PLUS TEAM-BY-TEAM RANKINGS
AND OUR PICK TO WIN IT ALL

SPORT

M·L·B 2013 PREVIEW

MIGUEL CABRERA EXPLAINS HIMSELF

THE $365M BATTLE TO DOMINATE LA

BUD SELIG SAVED BASEBALL. REALLY!

JOEY VOTTO IS SWINGING FOR PERFECTION

APRIL 1, 2013 $5.99

HERE'S TO THE CRAFT OF BASEBALL.

FIND NEW ROADS™

INTRODUCING THE ALL-NEW 2014 CHEVROLET IMPALA

An ode to white ash bats and finely stitched balls.
To perfectly maintained plates and fans who appreciate such details.
Here's to the craft and all the great things that come from it.

BLADES THINNER* THAN A SURGEON'S SCALPEL. DESIGNED TO CUT HAIR, NOT SKIN.

FUSION PROGLIDE

GLIDE OVER YOUR SENSITIVE SKIN WITH OUR GENTLEST** SHAVE.

DERMATOLOGIST #1 RECOMMENDED

Gillette

THE BEST A MAN CAN GET™

*FIRST 4 BLADES. **AMONG THOSE WITH A PREFERENCE. IN MANUAL & POWER RESPECTIVELY.

©2013 The Gillette Company

INSIDE

10 **THE TRUTH**
Rangers' ride over?
By Howard Bryant

12 **THE NUMBERS**
Why NBA GMs go mad.
By Peter Keating

16 **ZOOM**
Greg Jennings takes a timeout for tea.

18 **ZOOM**
Meet NASCAR's Rescue Randy.

100 **THE FIX**
Johnson's KO of DiPietro revisited. *By Chris Jones*

PLAYBOOK

21 **BOXING**
No Money, no problem: 50 Cent rings the bell.

26 **COLLEGE BASKETBALL**
Six X-factors who could vary during the tourney.

30 **NBA**
How Z-Bo became a force on the boards.

32 **NFL**
Eddie Lacy takes our scout head-on.

34 **MLS**
Kicking it with Galaxy coach Bruce Arena.

36 **TECH**
Performance enhancers even Selig can support.

38 **VISUALS**
The dryer that launched Sidney Crosby's career.

78 Mike Trout, 2012's AL ROY, is the biggest bargain ($510,000) on the Angels' $150 million roster.

FEATURES

41 **MLB PREVIEW**
"Hope springs eternal" is still a phrase best suited for the Cubs. But as our preview proves, these days any club can throw us a curve.

42 **THINKING INSIDE THE BOX**
Joey Votto's ability to dominate at the plate is as much about his smarts as it is his sweet swing. *By Buster Olney*

52 **THERE'S ALWAYS THIS YEAR**
The World Series race is wide open. (Our metrics say so.) But that didn't stop us from predicting the fates of all 30 clubs—and a winner.

78 **THE BEST BASEBALL $365 MILLION CAN BUY**
Spending spring training with the Angels and Dodgers, two teams coming off very fortunate offseasons. *By Eddie Matz*

88 **MLB CONFIDENTIAL**
We tossed some of baseball's most controversial topics at more than 100 big leaguers. They went deep.

90 **HANDLE WITH CARE**
Reigning AL MVP Miguel Cabrera finally lets us in on the mystery behind Miggy. *By Sam Alipour*

DON'T MISS

THE BASEBALL TONIGHT/ESPN THE MAGAZINE MLB PREVIEW SHOW
Is farmhand **Wil Myers** the Rays' answer in the outfield? Watch ESPN2 at 10 p.m. ET on March 21 for Tim Kurkjian's take on MLB's fastest risers.

cover photograph by DYLAN COULTER
THIS PAGE FROM TOP: JOHN HUET; KIM KLEMENT/USA TODAY SPORTS

ESPN Sports Heaven Collection

Ragtag, Irreverent, & Revolutionary

Celebrate where it all began.

Available online at ESPN SHOP

© 2012 ESPN, Inc.

GET SOME GREEN FOR YOUR TEAM!

We can help you reach your fundraising goals. Sell 2-year subscriptions (new, gift or renewal) to *ESPN The Magazine* and your team keeps 75% of the money!

It's an easy, flexible, and fast way to fundraise.

Sell 50 orders, your team keeps $1,500
Sell 150 orders, your team keeps $4,500

Learn more and sign up for free at
www.coaches.espn.com

ESPN
COACHES FUNDRAISING

insider RIGHT NOW ON ESPN.COM/INSIDER

FANTASY FULFILLMENT

ESPN.COM SEARCH: ERIC KARABELL

Want expert tips on how to stack your MLB fantasy team? Then allow Insider Eric Karabell to be your guru. The 12-year vet delivers daily insights on locks, risks and sleepers from all 30 teams. Trust us, he's in the fantasy writers Hall of Fame for a reason.

FREE AGENT KNOWLEDGE

ESPN.COM SEARCH: NFL FREE AGENT TRACKER

Insider's NFL Free Agent Tracker is the ultimate database for who's been signed, who's been tagged and who's left on the market. Get grades and scouts' takes on free agents across the league and even look back at every move over the past eight offseasons.

THE SEARCH FOR CINDERELLA

ESPN.COM SEARCH: GIANT KILLERS

For the eighth straight Dance, Insiders Peter Keating and Jordan Brenner will crunch the numbers and track the metrics, keeping an eye out for Giant Killers that could slingshot their way into March lore. So when your bracket goes down, don't say we didn't warn you.

Insider Spotlight
SHERI HACKWORTH

ESPN Insider since March 12: The Martinsville, Va., native can't imagine living anywhere but NASCAR country. "When I was a kid, you didn't go on vacation—you went to the races," says Hackworth, who works as a psychiatric technician at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, N.C. (That's Marine vet Mike Setzler with the assist.) Sheri also can't imagine cheering for a driver not named Denny Hamlin. "I was a fan from the first time I saw him race late models in 2000," she says. "He just had this 'I don't care' attitude on the track. But he always put family and fans first." Hackworth and husband Jon, also a Marine vet, have at least 30 autographs to prove it.

ARE YOU A SUPER-INSIDER?
Tweet a pic to @ESPNMag and you might wind up here.

How to become an ESPN Insider!

STEP 1

Find your account number on the mailing label of your ESPN The Magazine. *It starts with ESN and is 10 digits long.*

STEP 2

Go to ESPN.com/in4free. In the appropriate box, enter your account number and click "Activate your Insider account."

STEP 3

Fill in the required fields to create an Insider member name and password. Click "Finish." Congrats! You're already smarter.

THE MAG TURNS 15

GO TO: ESPN.COM/MAG15

To celebrate our anniversary, we picked the five best sports moments from each year since 1998—the winners are up to you. Vote at ESPN.com/Mag15, where you can also read our favorite stories from the archives and revisit all the athletes, music and pop culture that have influenced us over the past 15 years.

CONNECT WITH US

email us
themag@espn.com
like us
facebook.com/ESPNMagazine
follow us
twitter.com/ESPNMag
get us on your iPad
Download our free iPad app and enjoy digital issues plus a daily dose of time-sucking fun.

ESPN The Magazine
1.888.267.3684
P.O. Box 37325
Boone, IA 50037-0325
To change your address
log on to www.accountinfo.espnmag.com

Copyright © 2013 ESPN Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without the permission of ESPN The Magazine is prohibited. ESPN The Magazine does not accept and cannot be held responsible for any kind of unsolicited materials. From time to time, we allow selected companies to send mail to our subscribers for products and services that might be of interest. If you would rather not receive such mailings, please send your current mailing label or an exact copy of it to: ESPN, P.O. Box 37325, Boone, IA 50037-0325. PRINTED IN THE USA.

photograph by D.L. ANDERSON

from INTUIT

PRIMARY ACCOUNT
PH. 512-555-0148

2309812-09238
849823

309238

DATE: November 15th

PAY:
PUTTING IN OVERTIME AND MOVING UP THE RANKS. USD **1,748.57

PAYROLL

PAY TO: Marcus Wesson
Main Street
Nashville, TN 37215

26682 ⑈ 1⑥100029381 ⑆ 031696621 ⑈

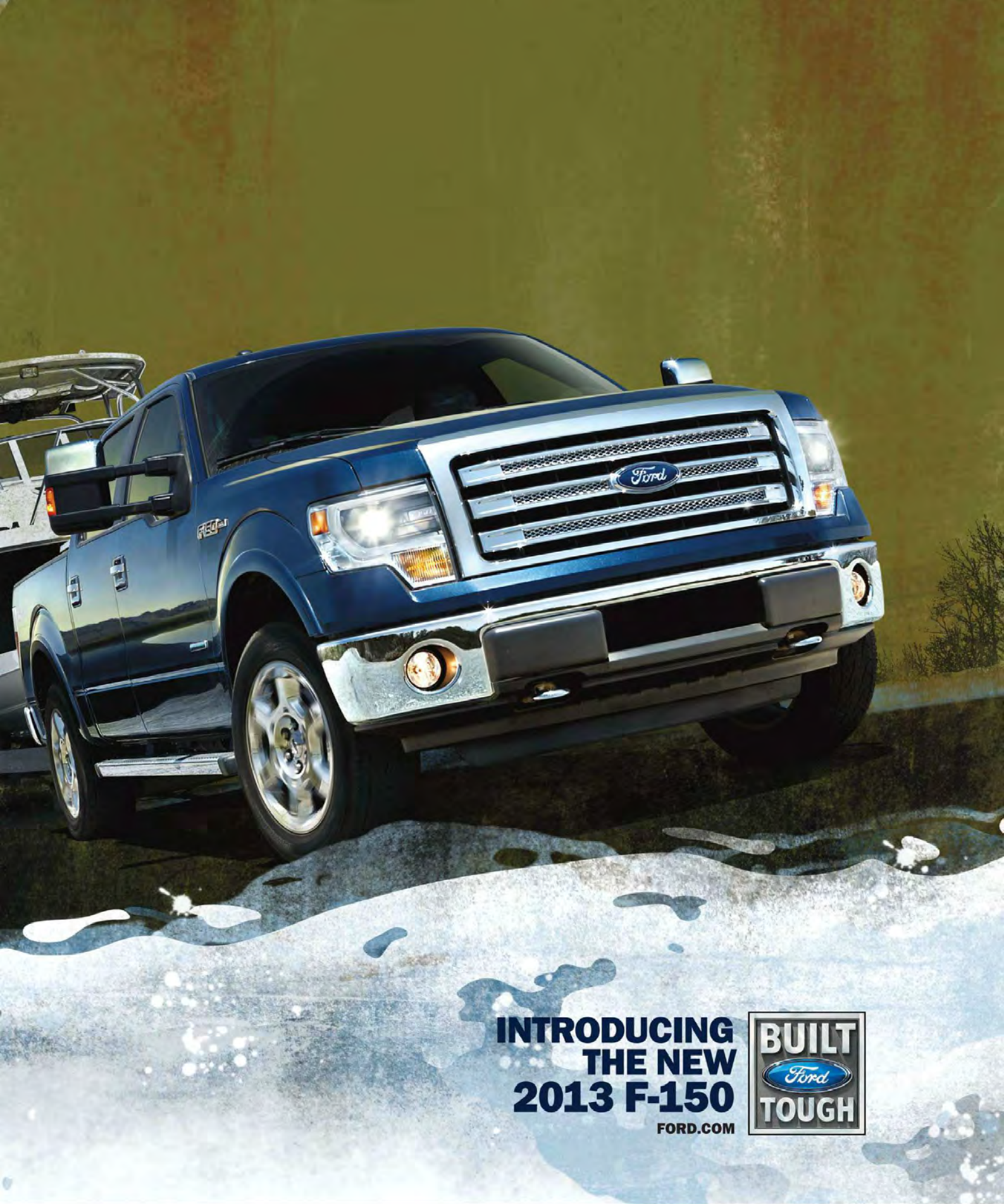
File free with TurboTax. And keep more of your money.

When your career is starting, every penny counts. That's why TurboTax lets you file your federal taxes free. The Federal Free Edition is free to prepare, print and e-file. And if you have questions, our tax experts are available to talk via live chat. Helping you get back every penny you deserve. *Get the Federal Free Edition at TurboTax.com.*

TurboTax
The power to keep what's yours.™

Tax professionals authorized under IRS Circular 230 to provide tax prep assistance. Live tax help service is subject to availability, restrictions & change without notice. See TurboTax.com for details.
©2012 Intuit Inc. All rights reserved. Intuit, the Intuit logo, TurboTax and the TurboTax checkmark design, among others, are registered trademarks and/or service marks of Intuit Inc., in the United States and other countries.

Fuel economy
without power is like
FISHIN'
WITHOUT BAIT.
Best combination of towing and fuel economy.*
11,300 lbs. 22 hwy mpg. That's quite a haul.
*When properly equipped. Based on max. towing and EPA-estimated 16 city/22 hwy mpg, 3.5L V6 4x2.
Class is Full-Size Pickups under 8,500 lbs. GVWR. Non-Hybrid vs. 2012/2013 competitors. 4x4 shown.


INTRODUCING
THE NEW
2013 F-150
FORD.COM
BUILT
Ford
TOUGH

by HOWARD BRYANT

[TEXAS SHOWDOWN] *Two years after the Rangers blew the World Series, a power struggle threatens to throw them for a much deeper loss.*

If a singular stone-tablet rule exists in sports, it reads that devastating losses result in devastating consequences. Teams that fail catastrophically do not rebound easily. The price is heavy, often paid over decades. The Rangers know this, and now a soaring franchise is suddenly on the brink, suddenly in danger of again being ordinary.

In 2010 Texas won the AL pennant for the first time, on the heels of securing a reported $3 billion TV deal over 20 years. The next season, crushingly, they came closer than any team in the history of baseball to winning the World Series without doing so—a strike away from a title in two different innings, missed opportunities each player will take to his grave. In 2012 the Rangers rolled the AL West, stalled in September, lost the division to Oakland on the last day of the season and became a casualty of MLB's new win-or-die wild-card format.

If there is a second stone-tablet rule, it is a painful corollary of the first: The greatest threat to success is bitterness over who receives the credit in victory and the blame in defeat. The Rangers know this now too; bitterness and blame have placed the franchise in quavering transition.

Veterans Lance Berkman and A.J. Pierzynski are newly arrived, but the former de facto captain, Michael Young, is gone to Philadelphia, taking with him a piece of the team's soul. "He came to work every day, took no days off," manager Ron Washington says. "When we won, he talked to the guys about getting better. When we lost or when he wasn't playing well, he stood there and accepted responsibility, even though you knew it was eating at him. He never shrunk. He was the guy who made sure the other guys, the younger guys, were meeting the standard, and because he was there, the clubhouse was being policed. Now that he's not there, a lot of guys are going to find out just how much he protected them."

Protection is exactly what's needed now. There will be hard feelings toward former teammate Josh Hamilton, who gave the impression that he quit in a pennant race before signing with the rival Angels for $125 million. Meanwhile, the collaboration of CEO Nolan Ryan and GM Jon Daniels has been rattled by a puzzling power shake-up, the kind that usually ends badly and that winning teams often regret.

Ryan gave the Rangers bigness and credibility but now lives in an opaque limbo, his role as the top man in the front office supposedly muddled by Daniels' recent promotion to president of baseball operations. Ryan had not spoken over the course of the first month of spring training, and though he is the most recognizable baseball name in Texas, he is barely visible, ostensibly weighing his feelings and options.

Maybe the Rangers are simply entering a new phase, but it is a dangerous one, a rudderless one without Young. Second baseman Ian Kinsler, who signed a five-year, $75 million extension last April, has already told management (as Hamilton once did) that he doesn't want the responsibility of being the leader. Still, Daniels, who risks the Pyrrhic victory of presiding over a weaker product, has no reservations about taking the team in a new direction. "It is sort of 'evolve or die,'" he says. "The reality is that Oakland caught us. Seattle is better. Anaheim is better. We had to adjust, but the formula is the same. By no means is this a rebuild."

The hardest thing to do in sports is to reinvent an organization. Five years ago, the Rangers were an indistinct franchise that hadn't won a single playoff series. Ryan, Washington and Daniels turned Texas into a powerhouse by creating continuity among three tense components: the legend; the lifelong baseball man who understands people in a time of analytics; and the modern, Ivy-educated baseball exec who was once a ridiculed outsider but now wields immense power.

Now it is unclear whether Ryan will stay or go and what the issue is—whether Daniels and Ryan suffered an irreversible rift over control, or whether being so close to winning finally kept the center from holding. Maybe the Rangers are simply evolving. Alternatively, maybe they stand at a juncture too common in sports: where they can regroup and rededicate together, or risk splintering into a thousand pieces.

Maybe the stone tablet has spoken, as it has for so many teams. ■

illustration by MARK SMITH

GAME OF THRONES
THE NEW SEASON
MARCH 31 AT 9
HBO
OR WATCH IT ON HBO GO
HBO GO is only accessible in the US and certain US territories. ©2013 Home Box Office, Inc. All rights reserved. HBO and related channels and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc.

by PETER KEATING

[METHOD TO THE MADNESS] *Just like the rest of us, NBA GMs go crazy over breakout stars of the NCAA tournament. But they're not wrong to lose their minds.*

[E]very spring a handful of college hoopsters blast themselves into our consciousness by playing better than we expect and leading their teams to big wins in the Big Dance. Kemba Walker in 2011, Derrick Rose in 2008, Carmelo Anthony in 2003—these guys have made us put down our brackets, sit up and say, "Hey, I didn't know that guy was this good!"

Well, according to a 2012 study of how bosses hire high-value employees, we're not the only ones. NBA teams scout hundreds of players across the country, tracking their every move for months on end, and put dozens of prospects through extensive workouts. Yet when it comes to draft night, clubs routinely rely on the same measure the rest of the country uses: NBA GMs, it turns out, favor players who had surprising success in the postseason. And the even bigger shocker? They're right to do so.

Economists Casey Ichniowski of Columbia and Anne Preston of Haverford studied March Madness because they wanted to investigate whether employers often overweigh recent and vivid information when making decisions. Earlier research had shown that when we make judgments, we rely on data that's accessible—the quickest and easiest stuff to gather—even when we know it's important to be objective. Social scientists call this the "availability heuristic," and it explains why Americans wrongly believe tornadoes kill more people than asthma: A spectacular catastrophe is easier to recall, so we overestimate its likelihood.

It turns out that NBA teams operate this way too. GMs draft less than three months after NCAA championship games, and they still have the tournament's teams and athletes on their minds. Ichniowski and Preston looked at where college players were drafted from 1997 to 2010 and compared that to their positions in mock drafts just before the Dance. Then they compared those draft shifts, positive and negative, to how well the players' teams did in the tournament, given the clubs' seeding, and how far over (or under) their regular-season stats the players performed. The authors found, "A prospect who scores more points in [March Madness] games than ... expected ... moves up significantly in the NBA draft."

Walker, Rose and Anthony all got draft-day boosts. So did Utah's Michael Doleac; he went from ranking 24th in mock drafts to being drafted 12th in 1998. Conversely, Maurice Evans, who shot 4-for-16 in Texas' first-round loss in the 2001 tournament, is probably the biggest March flameout: He sank from 13th in the pre-Madness mock drafts to not getting drafted at all. On average, a player who scores four points per game above expectations on a team that wins one more game than projected in the tournament will boost his draft position by 4.7 slots, according to Ichniowski and Preston.

Now, here's the thing: Players who get March Madness bumps deserve them. Ichniowski and Preston also examined what happened to players after their draft days. They looked at whether the guys made the NBA; how many points and assists they had in their first year and over the course of their careers, in the regular season and the playoffs; and the chances that they became superstars (defined as making three or more All-Star teams). In every case, the group that got draft boosts from the NCAA tournament played better than those who didn't. If anything, teams undervalue March Madness as a predictor of future success and stardom.

I usually repeat "sample size, sample size, sample size" about as often as and in the same tone that Jan Brady wailed "Marcia, Marcia, Marcia," so I was shocked by these results. For most players, March Madness lasts only a game or two, yet it sends a signal powerful enough to last entire careers.

"I'm thinking of showing my sports class a clip of Michael Jordan beating the Cavaliers and asking if you could have ever predicted this, so that maybe you take MJ at No. 1 instead of No. 3," Ichniowski says. "Then I'd like to show his NCAA shot [winning the national championship for North Carolina] and move to the question of how much to weight March Madness performance." The answer: At least as much as NBA GMs do now. The NCAA tournament, with its pressure-packed contests featuring the best college players in the country in front of gigantic audiences, is truly a meaningful simulation of NBA conditions. Keep that in mind when Doug McDermott or Kelly Olynyk surprises you this month. ■

Illustration by JOSUE EVILLA
©TREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES

LOOK ALIVE OUT THERE.

AMERICA'S FAVORITE COFFEE

DUNKIN' DONUTS®

AMERICA RUNS ON DUNKIN'®

© 2013 DD IP Holder LLC. All rights reserved.

ESPN GRABS A SEAT WITH

Cincinnati Reds Pitcher BRONSON ARROYO

WHO GIVES US A LITTLE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE ON NUMBER TWO.

As much as we admire them, athletes are human with very human needs. And like the rest of us, their bodies are in tune with nature – and nature's call. After all, the mantra "When you gotta go, you gotta go" can come into play at any point before, after and during the game.

Q **As a pitcher, have you ever experienced discomfort on the mound during a game?**

A As a starting pitcher, there's so much adrenaline, so much going on, that I don't notice anything. I don't think it could happen to me.

Q **You're also in the dugout for half the game, does that help?**

A Yeah, there's a bathroom next to every dugout in the league. Unless you're at Wrigley. If you're there, you gotta run up a hill about 100 yards and everybody can see you.

Q **Are you and your teammates open about using the bathroom before, during or after games?**

A No, but I've definitely seen some things in the locker room.

Q **Is that something that players try to keep close to the vest?**

A There were writers everywhere.

#TWEETFROMTHESEAT

NUMBER 1 AT NUMBER 2

Charmin®
enjoy the go

Cafe Jenne
Sique

ZOOM

WHO
NFL wide receiver Greg Jennings and his family (from far left): Alea, wife Nicole, Ayva and Amya (son Acie not pictured)

WHAT
Dress-up tea party at Café Jennings

WHEN
Feb. 23, 3:57 p.m. ET

WHERE
At home in Kalamazoo, Mich.

"We have normal tea parties, dress-up tea parties and sometimes we just sit down and talk about everything. It's a great way to get more insight into what's going through their minds. My wife doesn't participate as frequently as I do because she's viewed as the disciplinarian and Daddy is the fun guy. That's the way daddies are. And they like having tea parties with me because I make real tea, a mango tea, and put sugar on the table. Other than wearing one of their hats, Daddy doesn't have to dress up because he can't fit into any of their costumes. But I wouldn't mind dressing up if they told Daddy he really had to." ***—GREG JENNINGS,*** *as told to Anna Katherine Clemmons*

Photograph by
ROY RITCHIE

CERBERUS EMS
TRACKMEDIC
BUTLER

ZOOM

Meet Rescue Randy. Though he's just a 165-pound mannequin, he's treated like a real driver while being extracted from fiery wreckage at Charlotte Motor Speedway. It's all part of an annual safety training session in which crews, largely made up of local fire and EMS professionals, practice everything from fighting fires to treating injuries. Mark Martin, a 30-year veteran driver who has been in so many wrecks he walks as if his shoes are full of thumbtacks, certainly appreciates the attention to realism. "I love Randy and I've never even met him," he says. "That dude has saved my life." —*RYAN McGEE*

Photographs by
D.L. ANDERSON

150

Number of emergency professionals who underwent training at Charlotte Motor Speedway on March 2 and 3.

30

Number of ambulances on hand for a typical NASCAR race day at CMS.

700

Highest number of people treated on a NASCAR race day at CMS. Patients typically range from dehydrated fans to drivers involved in a wreck.

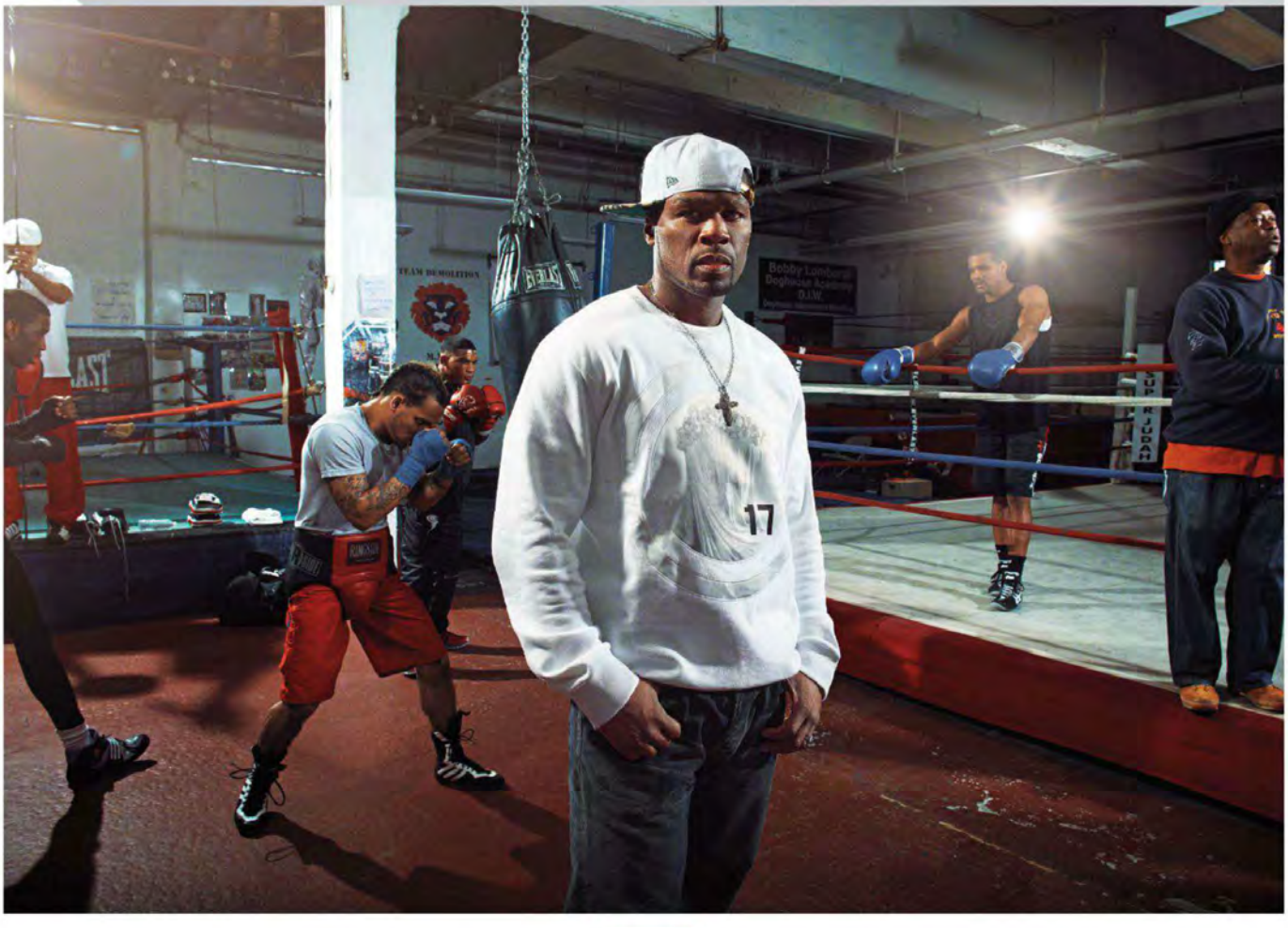
AMERICAN-MADE. FAMILY OWNED. FIERCELY INDEPENDENT.

At PEAK, we're the independent guys, running a family owned business nothing like Big Oil. Every day, we put American-made quality into good, honest oil and antifreeze with everything your engine needs to run right for the long haul. And what gets our motor going is using 65 years of experience in hot and cold protection to give you what's right for your engine—and your wallet. Because we're car guys, like you.

peakauto.com **RUN TRUE™**

©2013 OLD WORLD INDUSTRIES, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

PLAYBOOK



BOXING

50 CENT ANSWERS THE BELL

UNDETERRED BY HIS BREAKUP WITH FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR., **CURTIS JACKSON** HAS BIG PLANS AS A BOXING PROMOTER. BUT WILL HE BEAT THE GAME, OR WILL THE GAME BEAT HIM? *By Tim Struby*

photographs by FINLAY MacKAY
SWEATSHIRT: GIVENCHY; JEANS: PRPS; SNEAKERS: GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI; BELT: GUCCI; HAT: SNAPSONFIRE

This wasn't how he wanted his big weekend to go. Late on March 1, 50 Cent (né Curtis James Jackson III) walked to the ring at Foxwoods casino's MGM Grand Theater, delighting the capacity crowd with an impromptu rendition of "New Day." A few hours later, as co-promoter of his first boxing card, he took one square on the chin, watching his fighter Billy Dib lose the main event, and his IBF featherweight title, in a split decision to Evgeny Gradovich.

It's never a good night when a promoter performs better than his boxer, so Jackson canceled a postfight club appearance. Just don't expect him to stay down for long. Three days earlier, while holding court at Brooklyn's Judah Brothers Community Gym with fighters in his stable, he was already sizing up the resilience he'd need to crack the boxing game, the same way he cracked the rapping one. "With a true champion, you never count how many times they get knocked down," he said. "You count the times they get up."

Jackson, of course, has gotten up countless times: after being shot nine times in a 2000 incident, after various hip-hop beefs and most recently after a public split with friend Floyd Mayweather Jr. In July 2012, the two icons said they would launch TMT (The Money Team) Promotions. The company, as Jackson explained at the time, would give fighters more control over their careers, and it would put on cards designed to attract young fans.

But it fell apart before a single punch was thrown. While Mayweather spent last summer in a cell for misdemeanor domestic battery, Jackson says he made a surprising discovery: TMT hadn't obtained a promoter's license or signed fighters. "It was just a name," says Jackson.

So the 37-year-old rapper put up nearly $2 million for a promoter's license and to secure fighters' rights. He signed four talented fighters: Dib, super middleweight contender Andre Dirrell, former WBA featherweight champ Celestino Caballero and undefeated super featherweight Yuriorkis Gamboa. He thought he was laying the groundwork for a business.

But when Mayweather was released in August, Jackson asserts his partner refused to put up his half of the cash. "There was no discussion, no sit-down," he says. "All communication was shot down." (Mayweather and his camp did not return calls for this story.) Jackson politely refers to the fallout as "a learning experience," but in reality he felt betrayed both professionally and personally.

By November, following a highly publicized Twitter spat, their partnership was over. Now in the aftermath of Dib's loss, Jackson has to figure out the boxing game on his own with his own company, SMS Promotions.

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SEE 50 CENT FAIL ... SO THOSE PEOPLE WILL TUNE IN TO SEE WHETHER BILLY DIB LOSES.

Dib (far left) and Gamboa aren't household names—but Jackson has a plan to change that.

While he thinks his experience in the music business might help, boxing is a different beast. Talent is only part of the equation.

Successful promoters need a trustworthy team of lawyers, matchmakers and staffers. They have to deal with other promoters, managers, fighters, officials, regulations and egos. It's countless headaches of epic proportions, and far more promoters have been knocked down than gotten rich, including Sugar Ray

THE PLAYLIST
50 CENT

IT'S A MAN'S MAN'S MAN'S WORLD
James Brown

INNER CITY BLUES (MAKE ME WANNA HOLLER)
Marvin Gaye

FREDDIE'S DEAD
Curtis Mayfield

POP LIFE
Prince and the Revolution

B.U.D.D.Y.
Musiq Soulchild

LADY
D'Angelo

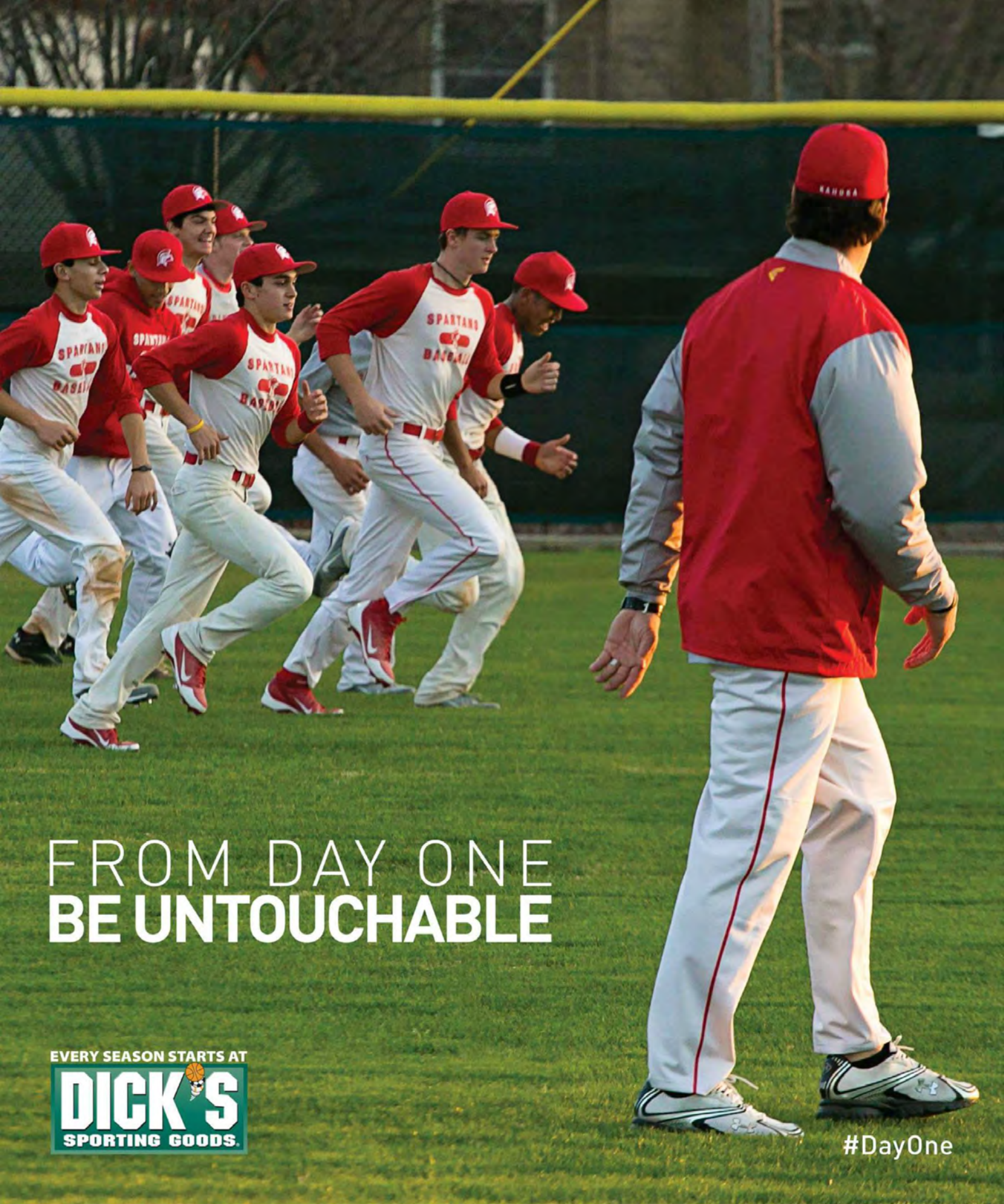
RISIN' TO THE TOP
Keni Burke

BACK TO LIFE (HOWEVER DO YOU WANT ME)
Soul II Soul

GOOD LOVIN
Slim featuring Fabolous & Ryan Leslie

MY LIFE
50 Cent featuring Eminem & Adam Levine

Illustration by ROBERT BALL


FROM DAY ONE
BE UNTOUCHABLE
EVERY SEASON STARTS AT
DICK'S
SPORTING GOODS.
#DayOne

Leonard, ex-referee Mills Lane and former music promoter Cedric Kushner.

Then there's the fallout from the Mayweather spat. Underscoring the distance between the two, while Jackson was promoting his first card, shown on ESPN's *Friday Night Fights*, Mayweather was finalizing his six-fight pay-per-view deal with Showtime that could be worth upward of $200 million to him. Moreover, in severing ties with the sport's biggest draw, Jackson also separated himself from Al Haymon, Mayweather's adviser and one of boxing's most powerful players. Haymon controls a host of other superstars, most notably WBC lightweight champ Adrien Broner, who has been mentioned as a possible Gamboa opponent.

Ultimately Jackson needs to deal with Mayweather's camp more than it needs to deal with him—and he knows it. "I'm gonna have to deal with the guys who have the best opponents," he says. "So I'm gonna work with Richard Schaefer at Golden Boy and with Top Rank and even with Al Haymon."

Jackson already has shown glimmers of savvy. While negotiating with Top Rank for the rights to Gamboa's contract, he landed the junior lightweight a televised slot on the undercard of the promotion's Manny Pacquiao-Juan Manuel Marquez PPV event in December. Gamboa dominated on the way to a unanimous decision over Michael Farenas. "He's not a guy coming into the sport with $10 million and thinking he's smarter than everyone else," says Lou DiBella, one of boxing's most successful promoters and Jackson's partner on the Foxwoods card. "He knows what he doesn't know, which is essential for this investment in his future."

Jackson's fighters are all talented, but not many people outside of boxing have heard of them. So now he has to draw on the marketing genius that made him a millionaire in hip-hop, apparel and even flavored water. He's making certain that Gamboa, a Cuban defector, learns English. He's scheming up a TV reality show, à la *The Ultimate Fighter*. He also intends to change the current fight card paradigm. "I want to do away with the main event," he says. "I want the entire card itself to be the main event. Not just the last fight."

Another thing he gets: the power of his own Q rating. "Due to the competitive nature of hip-hop, there are people who want to see 50 Cent fail," he says. "So those people will tune in to see if Billy Dib loses—and that's a vital connection through pop culture."

In other words, he wins even when he loses. ■

50's initial share in VitaminWater turned into a reported $100 million payout. Can he pull the same trick in boxing?

LINE 'EM UP, KNOCK 'EM DOWN

50 Cent may be the only household name in the SMS stable, but that could change fast. Here's a look at the potential path to the main event for four of his fighters—and the obstacles standing in their way.

YURIORKIS GAMBOA 22-0, 16 KOs
Short and stocky with fast hands, he won Olympic gold as a flyweight in 2004, then proved to be a crowd-pleaser following his defection from Cuba in '06. Yet the former WBA and IBF featherweight champ also has shown a tendency to get knocked down. As The Ring's No. 3-ranked junior lightweight, he's angling to test his chin against rising star Adrien Broner.

CELESTINO CABALLERO 36-4, 23 KOs
The former WBA featherweight champion is an entertaining fighter, but he's had problems making weight. He's scheduled to face Robinson Castellanos on April 20 in a WBC eliminator bout, with the winner likely to fight current WBC champ Daniel Ponce de Leon—whom Caballero beat in '05. The 36-year-old vet is trained by Jeff Mayweather, Floyd's uncle.

BILLY DIB 35-2, 21 KOs
With his stalwart defensive style, Billy the Kid won fights but bored fans. But after his 2008 loss, he returned to his native Australia and paired with trainer Billy Hussein. He's now fighting straight ahead with both guns blazing. His aggression may have cost him the IBF featherweight belt in his March 1 loss to Evgeny Gradovich, but he left fans pining for a rematch. Expect one soon.

ANDRE DIRRELL 21-1, 14 KOs
The rangy 6'2" southpaw won bronze as a middleweight in the 2004 Olympics, but his pro career was derailed in '10 when Arthur Abraham KO'd him while he was already down. He won by DQ but later took 21 months off because of neurological problems. He beat Michael Gbenga in his second comeback fight in February and is scheduled to fight Ossie Duran in April.

SHIRT: G-STAR RAW. JEANS: PRPS. SHOES: LANVIN. HOODIE: HEATHEN. JACKET AND BELT: GUCCI. HAT: NEW ERA

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ERIC JAMISON/AP IMAGES; TORU TAKAHASHI/AP IMAGES; NICK POTTS/PA PHOTOS/LANDOV; WARREN CLARKE/EPA/LANDOV

AMERICAN
CREW
Official Supplier to Men™
DRIVE HER WILD
You can never be sure where your night is going to take you. But when you've got the kind of look that drives her wild, you can be sure it's going to be good. Find your look, your grooming product and your hairstylist at americancrew.com.
AMERICAN CREW
CLASSIC BODY WASH
POWER CLEANSER STYLE REMOVER
3-IN-1
DAILY MOISTURIZING SHAMPOO
STIMULATING CONDITIONER
Available at professional salons and authorized retailers, including:
SportClips HAIRCUTS
beautybrands
ULTA
Great Clips
© 2013 Colgate Beauty Brands USA, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

RESULTS MAY VARY

They score, but they're never the primary option. They defend, but their jobs extend beyond locking down a top scorer. They start, but they don't star. Meet the guys commonly referred to as X-factors: players whose performance is often a bellwether of their team's success. These X's exhibit great degrees of variance, blowing up in wins and falling apart in losses. And for a six-pack of top NCAA tourney teams, a deep run may ultimately hinge on whichever version of their X shows up over the next few weeks. —JORDAN BRENNER

DUKE

RASHEED SULAIMON 6'4" SG

The freshman's shooting is key for two reasons: First, when Sulaimon is clicking, he allows Duke to trot out five players who can all score, making it difficult for foes to double-team Mason Plumlee in the post or deny Seth Curry on the wing. But if his jumper is off the mark, teams can leave him alone and help elsewhere. Second, his inaccuracy affects the team's defense. Sulaimon is Duke's biggest and most athletic perimeter player, and he is really the only guy capable of matching up with a top midsize scorer. But he has to be on the court to do that, and Coach K has opted for Tyler Thornton lately when Sulaimon misfires.

IN WINS 46.1 FG%, 42.4 3PT%
IN LOSSES 24.4 FG%, 16.7 3PT%

GONZAGA

GARY BELL JR. 6'1" SG

The sample size is small: Gonzaga lost only twice in the regular season. But Bell's numbers within those L's—largely from one invisible performance at Butler (33 minutes, one shot, no points)—also speak to a larger point. The sophomore tends to either drift or be ignored in favor of the team's three primary options. Bigs Kelly Olynyk and Elias Harris draw attention inside, and PG Kevin Pangos is the focus of defenses on the perimeter. If a team corrals them successfully, the onus falls on Bell, who has first-option ability. Says Santa Clara coach Kerry Keating, "If they're going to get to the Final Four, he's going to have to have a monster game at some point."

IN WINS 9.4 PPG, 7.9 FGA, 2.3 APG
IN LOSSES 6.0 PPG, 5.0 FGA, 1.5 APG

GEORGETOWN

NATE LUBICK 6'8" PF

Georgetown is thin, both inside and on the bench. Only Lubick has the bulk to pound with other top posts. But the junior has landed in foul trouble in several big games, hurting Georgetown at both ends. In addition to his post defense, he is also the Hoyas' best passing big man. In fact, he finished just one assist behind point guard Markel Starks for the team's regular-season lead. That's a key skill in the Hoyas' Princeton-style offense, in which the 5-man is often asked to make plays away from the basket. Sophomore forward Otto Porter Jr. might be the team's indispensable do-it-all maestro, but no one can replicate Lubick's contributions either.

IN WINS 7.9 PPG, 2.5 FPG, 1.9 TPG
IN LOSSES 4.8 PPG, 3.8 FPG, 3.4 TPG

INDIANA

CHRISTIAN WATFORD 6'9" PF

Few teams have a forward like Watford, who is skilled enough to stretch the floor and big enough to do work underneath. But the senior is also a classic case of a player whose game rises and falls with his shot. When he is sinking threes, he's an active rebounder, defender and cutter. When he doesn't bring that energy, though, it opens up holes in Indiana's defense. Just look at the six times he didn't reach double digits in points during the regular season: He averaged just 4.2 rpg in those games, blocked a total of two shots and had only four steals. In the NCAA tourney, the Hoosiers can't afford for him to let up in those areas, regardless of what his stroke looks like.

IN WINS 12.7 PPG, 50.6 3PT%, 6.7 RPG
IN LOSSES 10.4 PPG, 38.9 3PT%, 4.6 RPG

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GERRY BROOME/AP IMAGES; ROBERT JOHNSON/ICON SMI; BRETT HANSBAUER/SCHWARTZMAN SPORTS; EVAN HABEEB/USA TODAY SPORTS

Hampton

Hamptonality

A ton more Hilton HHonors™ points plus the value of Hampton. Double your HHonors and earn Double Points or Double Miles when you register at Hampton.com/Double and stay by 3-31-13.*

*Terms and conditions apply. See Hampton.com/Double for full details.

©2013 Hilton Worldwide

Feel the Hamptonality™

hamptonoffers.com

HILTON HHONORS

WALDORF ASTORIA

CONRAD

Hilton

DOUBLETREE

EMBASSY SUITES

Hilton Garden Inn

Hampton

HOMEWOOD SUITES

HOME2

Hilton Grand Vacations

KANSAS

TRAVIS RELEFORD 6'6" SG

The Jayhawks offense is frustratingly inconsistent, and no player exemplifies that more than Releford. For most of this season, he has been superbly efficient in a supporting role, but he has disappeared in KU's losses, as he did on Feb. 6, when he attempted just one shot at TCU. Releford is Kansas' best perimeter defender, and Bill Self has no similar options at the 3, which is why the senior led the team with 34.7 mpg in conference play. If Releford is going to be on the floor so much, then he must be a willing shooter, especially given his improved stroke from deep (44.0 3PT%). It's now up to him to bring it for six straight games.

IN WINS 13.2 PPG, 61.2 FG%, 7.5 FGA
IN LOSSES 5.4 PPG, 32.0 FG%, 5.0 FGA

LOUISVILLE

PEYTON SIVA 6'0" PG

Guard Russ Smith is a case study in inconsistency—hence the Russdiculous nickname—and center Gorgui Dieng has emerged as a game changer inside. But as Siva goes, so go the Cardinals. It's not that the senior has to be a scorer. That's not his strength. But he can't be a drag either, and that means he has to knock down an occasional open jumper and avoid forcing plays in the lane. It speaks volumes about Siva that his assist and steal rates are just as high in losses as in wins (5.9 apg, 2.0 spg for the season). But Louisville is hardly an offensive juggernaut, so in the postseason its veteran point guard must be a model of efficiency.

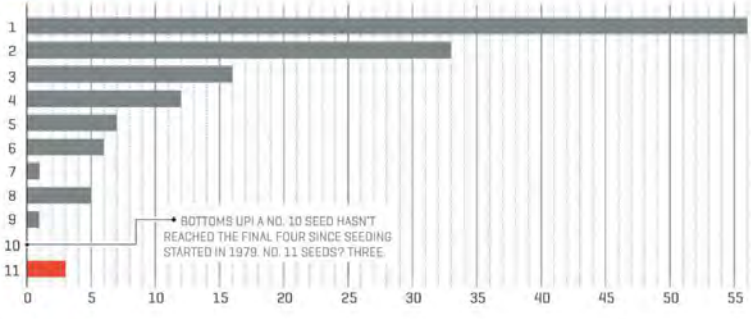
IN WINS 10.3 PPG, 43.3 FG%, 33.3 3PT%, 2.6 TPG
IN LOSSES 7.8 PPG, 33.3 FG%, 18.8 3PT%, 3.4 TPG

OFF THE SHELF
THE ULTIMATE BOOK OF MARCH MADNESS BY TOM HAGER

GLASS SLIPPER, HALF FULL

What does a sports writer do when he can't find a book to satisfy his hoops hunger? If you're Tom Hager, you write it. In his ode to postseason college basketball, Hager divides his passion into two parts: The first is a year-by-year compendium of NCAA champs (1939-2012) and their journeys to the title. The other half looks back—via interviews and insights from former players and coaches—at the top 100 games that busted records and brackets. As seen in the chart below, Hager's analysis upends the idea that "it's anybody's tournament." The vast majority of semifinalists are **top seeds**. But that just makes those Cinderellas all the more special. And who knows: In a season dominated by overtime buzzer-beating nail-biters, maybe this is the March when a 10-seed goes where no No. 10 has gone before: to the Final Four.

FINAL FOUR TRIPS BY SEED



11

LSU (1986), **George Mason (2006)** and VCU (2011) all made the semifinals as No. 11 seeds. The most improbable Final Four appearance, however, may have come in 1952 in the form of Santa Clara. The Broncos entered the tournament with a 15-10 record but earned a spot in the first true Final Four.

KATZ KORNER

ANDY KATZ GOES ONE-ON-ONE WITH MIAMI COACH **JIM LARRANAGA.**

How did life change after taking George Mason to the Final Four in 2006? I accomplished one of my goals by working for the Washington Speakers Bureau as a corporate speaker, and I absolutely love that. I got invited to work the Michael Jordan fantasy camp, which opened up the opportunity to come to Miami because of the friends I made there. And I had a chance to really advance my philosophy by coming here to test what we had done at the mid-major level for 25 years and see if it worked at the highest level in college basketball.

Which would you rather have: an older, experienced team or one with young talent? Both. When guys have been with me for a while, they learn what we want from them, and I learn what they're good at. I try to put them in a position where they do good. If they do something well, we try to figure out a way to get it into the offense.

What makes this team ready to handle the postseason grind? I said this before the season: If we stay healthy, we could have the best season in Miami history because we have senior leadership and a talented group of underclassmen.

What's the biggest difference between coaching as an assistant in the ACC in the '80s and now, as a head coach? Being the one making the decisions as compared to being the assistant making suggestions. And the level of player I have inherited has given me an opportunity to really experience the success we're enjoying this year.

What do you want the lasting image from this season to be? Cutting down the nets.

KATZ KORNER MOVES TO MONDAYS ON ESPNU DURING THE NCAA TOURNAMENT.

Illustration by MICKEY DUZYJ

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP IMAGES; DAVID BUTLER II/USA TODAY SPORTS; WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

Let more outside in.

The all-new Volkswagen Beetle Convertible opens up to the world with the push of a button, and the available 200-hp turbocharged engine makes it hard to come back inside. **That's the Power of German Engineering.**

Das Auto.

Volkswagen Carefree Maintenance®

3 Years or 36,000 Miles of No-Charge Scheduled Maintenance.
Whichever occurs first. Some restrictions. See dealer or program for details.

vw.com

©2013 Volkswagen of America, Inc.

WHEN I KNEW... I COULD BOARD WITH THE BEST OF THEM

ZACH RANDOLPH
Grizzlies power forward

CRED CHECK
Z-Bo, now in his 12th season, is averaging 11.6 rebounds per game* for Memphis, the league's stingiest D in opponent ppg.

MY MOMENT One of the first games of my sophomore year at Marion High School in Indiana—man, that's when everything changed. I was finally on the varsity squad, balling with the older guys, and we were playing Anderson Highland. I was 6'8", but their center was big too—6'7", a real thick and muscular dude. And I dominated him. I had 16 rebounds by the middle of the fourth quarter, but the hardest one was No. 17.

I remember the play like it was yesterday. I was on the right block when their guard put up a jumper. Their center boxed me out real good, and there was a lot of traffic, maybe three other guys in the area, but I found some breathing room, anticipated the bounce off the rim, gathered my legs, got my big butt off the ground and just leaped over them, snatching that ball with my left hand. Ha-ha ... yeah, boy! And keep in mind, I've got small hands, man. Always did, still do. But I cradled it with my left hand for a second and then dribbled it out of traffic. Now, in high school I was a fan of C-Webb, so I loved to bring the ball up the court like him. But in this case, I passed it to our point guard, Andre Betts. I don't even remember how that play ended. All I was thinking at that point was, Damn, rebounding is an art!

How did I do it? Well, rebounding is about positioning, yeah, but it's also about having a feel for the ball and how it comes off the rim. That play, where I anticipated it perfectly and grabbed a one-hander in traffic, that's when I knew I had that special feel. My boys knew it too. After the game, everybody was talking about my 25 points and 20 boards, but those guys in the trenches were talking about that 17th rebound. My coaches gave me love, and Andre said, "Man, that s— was crazy, Z-Bo! I ain't never seen nothin' like that." After that, I was like, "You know what, man? I can rebound with the best of 'em." Even if I do have small hands. —AS TOLD TO SAM ALIPOUR

MAG MINUTE

DWIGHT HOWARD
LAKERS CENTER

If you were a talk-show host, whom would you want as your first guest?
LeBron James. He's my dog.

Who would play you in your biopic?
I know he's white, but Johnny Depp. He's pretty good. He's funny.

What was your best Halloween costume?
A couple of years ago, I went as a bum.

What is your idea of a perfect day?
Wake up, have a nice breakfast, go practice, go to the movies, play video games and sleep.

What is your guilty pleasure?
Skittles.

Who is one person you met but wish you'd had more time to talk to?
Barack Obama. We'd talk about how to make the world a better place.

What is your hidden talent?
I like to sing. I used to play the piano. And I'm good at giving massages.

What place do you most want to visit?
Antarctica. It's very cold, but to see penguins and all the animals in their natural habitat would be cool.

*ALL STATS THROUGH MARCH 11

illustration by CHIP WASS
JOE MURPHY/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

UNCONVENTIONAL CHIC
LACOSTE
CELEBRATING EIGHTY
New York • Los Angeles • Miami • Las Vegas
Chicago • Dallas • Houston • San Francisco • Honolulu
Montréal • Toronto • Vancouver

SCOUTTAKES

IN THE RUNNING

Even with a bum hammy, former Alabama running back **Eddie Lacy** has generated mostly rave reviews heading into the April 25 draft. Key word: mostly. We asked an unnamed scout for his take on the 5'11", 231-pounder, then got feedback from our experts—and the Tide star himself. Now, that's having field vision.

THE SCOUT

Lacy has the talent. He had that great Alabama offensive line,[1] but he is a really tough guy too.[2] Lacy isn't big,[3] yet he runs big, kind of like Jerome Bettis,[4] with good feet and balance.[5] I worry about his softness—not in his running style but his physique. He's not a cut-up guy like most running backs.[6] It's actually a good thing that he wasn't the main guy at Alabama for very long, because he doesn't have much wear and tear. He played in a pro-style offense in college,[7] though I'm not sure if he can catch the ball.[8] Overall, I like Lacy a lot.

1 EDDIE LACY
I did have a great line, but I didn't do as well as I did just because of my line. The line helped me, and I helped the line.

2 KC JOYNER, ESPN INSIDER
Lacy is terrific in space: According to my metrics, he averaged 9.4 and 10.4 ypc when given good blocking the past two years. By comparison, Trent Richardson averaged 9.3 at Bama in 2011.

3 MEL KIPER JR., DRAFT ANALYST
I disagree. He'll play at a full 230 pounds, with big-play potential. I actually think he could use that size and power more. He runs a little upright, like he doesn't trust his size.

4 BILL POLIAN, ESPN INSIDER/ FORMER COLTS GM
Totally disagree. I don't think he resembles Bettis at all. Lacy has very nimble feet and good vision and does not run into piles or try to run over people.

5 SAM MONSON, PRO FOOTBALL FOCUS
Lacy is so tough to bring down. In the BCS title game, 101 of his 140 rushing yards came after contact, and he forced a ridiculous 13 missed tackles. He should go higher than he will.

6 LACY
Whether you're cut up or not, who cares? At the end of the day, you've got to play football, and I get the job done better than some guys who are cut up. And by the way, I work out every day, just like everybody else.

7 POLIAN
He's far more ready to play than a back coming out of a spread system. To me, he's the No. 1 running back and worthy of a first-round pick.

8 LACY
I am a great pass catcher out of the backfield. I'm a complete back.

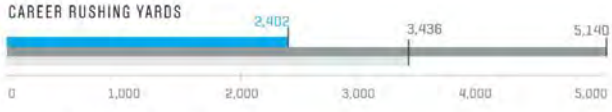
HERE'S HOW LACY COMPARES WITH TOP RUNNING BACK PROSPECTS MONTEE BALL OF WISCONSIN AND ANDRE ELLINGTON OF CLEMSON.

EDDIE LACY
ALABAMA RB

HEIGHT 5'11"
WEIGHT 231
BEST 40 TIME 4.44
PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS TOP-30 PICK

CAREER YARDS PER GAME VS. TOP-10 TEAMS

CAREER RUSHING YARDS



CAREER YARDS PER CARRY

illustration by BRYAN CHRISTIE DESIGN

MATTHEW EMMONS/USA TODAY SPORTS

DEW, MTN DEW, THE MTN DEW LOGO AND KICKSTART™ ARE TRADEMARKS OF PEPSICO, INC.

MTNDEWKICKSTART.com

PITCH IMPERFECT

COACH **BRUCE ARENA** IS PRIMED TO LEAD THE LA GALAXY TO A THIRD STRAIGHT TITLE, SO WHY DOESN'T HE SEEM HAPPIER? —*Doug McIntyre*

MLS has a stated goal of becoming one of the best leagues in the world by 2022. How realistic is that?
We're a long way away, to be honest. Our teams still make roster cuts because of the salary cap. We continue to grow, but unless we spend considerably more on wages, we're not going to be competitive with the top teams in the world.

What do you say about people who watch the English Premier League but don't think MLS is worth their time?
I say they're pretty stupid. MLS is like any league: There are good games and bad games. If someone would rather watch Barcelona than an MLS game, I'd probably agree. But our league has grown substantially, and many people enjoy it. Our biggest problem is that we continually beat down on ourselves.

When will MLS produce its own global star?
We're interested in developing players for the Galaxy who can make our national team better. If players continue to develop, naturally they'll be pursued by big clubs. The goal is to improve the American players to make our league better and, at the international level, to challenge to win a World Cup. Unfortunately people think we're supposed to have a Lionel Messi and win World Cups overnight.

No team has won three consecutive MLS Cups. If the Galaxy pull that off this year, what would it mean for the team and the league?
I don't think the league would be happy. The league's plan is to not have any club be particularly good for an extended period of time. That's the basis of the single entity [ownership structure], to bring about parity. It would be good for our organization, but that's not our focus.

You've coached Landon Donovan for 12 of the last 13 years. Recently he took leave from the Galaxy. What persuaded you to let him skip the start of the season?
I'm not necessarily okay with it, but if a player doesn't want to play, you don't want him playing. He's unique. He just got to a point where fatigue became a factor and he needed to step away. If not, he was going to be useless to us anyway, so it made sense to let him have his time. I think Landon will come back and be better having had the rest. Do I think it's ideal? No. Again the modern athlete is a little different. That is an example of it.

How closely do you follow the national team?
Not as closely as I used to. I don't even know some of the players, which is odd as the former coach. Players on the national team should be—and this is my own feeling—they should be Americans. If they're all born in other countries, I don't think we can say we are making progress.

The players on the national team are now mostly European-based. When you coached the U.S. in 2002, more than half of your starters came from MLS. It should still be the case, in my opinion.

Why isn't it?
I can't answer that. That's the job of the coach. But from what I've seen over the past couple of years, plenty of MLS players can play an important role on the national team.

Are they getting enough opportunities?
You can do the math and figure out if they are or not.

How do you think the national team coach, Jurgen Klinsmann, is doing?
That's not for me to state publicly. I think his goal is to get his team to the World Cup, and I think they'll do that.

The U.S. lost its first World Cup qualifier of 2013 in February. Hypothetical question: If the team is in danger of missing a trip to Brazil and you're asked to return as coach, what do you say?
I think it's not proper to respond to that question. There's a coach in place. I don't think it's right for a fellow professional to comment on somebody else's job.

DATA DIVE

ATTACK!

MLS isn't known for back-and-forth action, with fewer fast-break goals than any other major league last season. Instead, teams like defending Eastern Conference champ Sporting Kansas City capitalize on crosses and limit counterattacks (0.8 goals allowed per game in 2012).

225

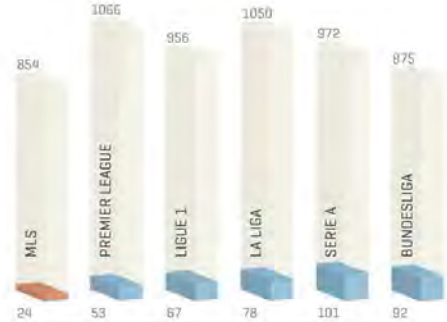
HIGHEST NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL CROSSES BY AN MLS TEAM LAST SEASON. SKC HELD THAT TOP SPOT, COMPLETING A LEAGUE-HIGH 29.7% OF CROSS ATTEMPTS.

99

NUMBER OF CHANCES CREATED BY SKC MIDFIELDER ◀ **GRAHAM ZUSI** IN 2012. THAT'S 20 MORE THAN ANY OTHER PLAYER. OF THE 99 CHANCES, 52 RESULTED FROM A CROSS.

When it comes to fast-break goals, MLS has some catching up to do when compared with the big five European leagues.

Stats are from the 2012 MLS season and the 2011-12 European seasons. Own goals excluded.



	MLS	PREMIER LEAGUE	LIGUE 1	LA LIGA	SERIE A	BUNDESLIGA
TOTAL GOALS	854	1066	956	1050	972	875
FAST-BREAK	24	53	67	78	101	92
PERCENTAGE	**2.8%**	**5.0%**	**7.0%**	**7.4%**	**10.4%**	**10.5%**

FIGURES COMPILED BY ALBERT LARCADA, ESPN STATS AND INFORMATION

FROM TOP: JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/USA TODAY SPORTS; HOWARD C. SMITH/ISI PHOTOS

adidas
more energy
more confidence
adidas hair & body wash
2 in 1
adidas
DEEP
Energy
GINSENG
VIVIFYING
HAIR & BODY WASH
adidas
DYNAMIC
Pulse
PEPPERMINT
VITALIZING
HAIR & BODY WASH

SCIENCE OF SUCCESS

A LAB OFFERS **PERFORMANCE ENHANCERS** EVEN SELIG CAN SUPPORT. *By Anna Katherine Clemmons*

Twins prospect Andrew Ferreira stands shirtless on a makeshift mound, doing his best to ignore the 62 button-size reflective markers attached to his body. His job on this January day is to throw naturally for about 25 pitches. The techs at the Mass General Orthopaedics Sports Performance Center will then go to town, using the latest in high-tech performance analysis to evaluate the prospect's form. "Our purpose isn't to do anything the pitching coach is doing," orthopedic surgeon and center director Eric Berkson says. "We look at training from a new perspective."

The center, which opened last June in Foxborough, makes its team of doctors and coaches available to any jock, from amateur to all-star, though the first programs are targeted toward baseball players, golfers and runners. Aside from benefiting the athletes, the data will aid in orthopedics research, Berkson says.

Every session generates a mass of useful information. After Ferreira finishes throwing, biomechanical engineer Sean Driscoll crunches data on how each of his muscle groups moves, while the center's pitching coach, Matt Kramer, examines a series of 3-D images of the 22-year-old's body. Bingo: Kramer notices that Ferreira's head bounced around on one pitch and his hip rotation looked stiff.

Ferreira, drafted out of Harvard in 2012, says the feedback, along with seeing slow-motion imagery of his form, reinforced several improvements he wants to make. Among them: controlling his stride and not forcing his velocity. "If I were a team GM and I had $50 million to invest, I'd definitely look at something like this," he says.

Ferreira actually paid just $75 for his snapshot evaluation—cheaper than a personal trainer and maybe more useful. Says former Red Sox DH Sam Horn, now the center's batting coach: "I look at this as a legal steroid."

1. CAMERAS
Twenty-two high-speed LED cameras can identify the tiniest inconsistencies in a player's motion.

2. MARKERS
Reflective markers on the pitcher's body interact with the cameras to allow detailed examination of each pitch.

3. RADAR
Coaches track pitch speed and count while scientists compile data about muscle movement.

4. DIGITAL SCAN
A 3-D on-screen avatar shows arm speed and rotation and isolates how each muscle group moves.

illustration by BRYAN CHRISTIE DESIGN

PAIN IS TEMPORARY.
TRIPLE CROWNS ARE FOREVER.

LET'S MAKE
EXCELLENT
HAPPEN.

©2013 New Balance Athletic Shoe, Inc.

new balance.com/baseball

Say hello to Miguel Cabrera, 2012 Triple Crown and MVP winner.
He's in the New Balance MX20v3 preparing for his encore.

"THE FIRST COUPLE OF TIMES I HIT THE DRYER, MY MOM WASN'T TOO HAPPY ABOUT IT, BUT IT MIGHT HAVE SOME SENTIMENTAL VALUE TO HER NOW." —*SIDNEY CROSBY*

SPORTIFACT

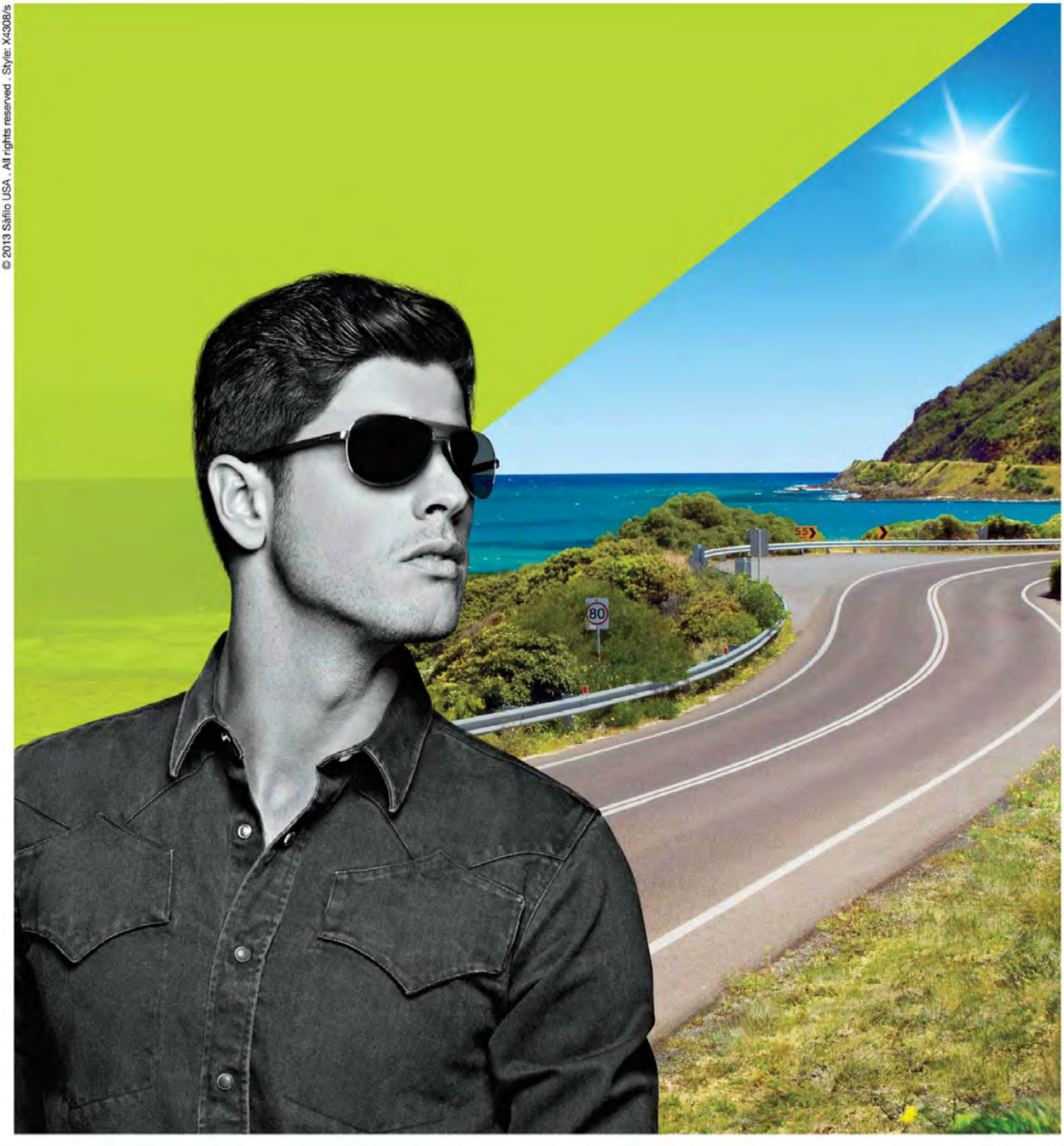
SHOT CYCLE

Legend has it that a young **Sidney Crosby** perfected his slapper by firing puck after puck at his parents' old Whirlpool dryer. But that tale, which was perpetuated by the Penguins center's 2005 appearance on *The Tonight Show* and a later Reebok ad, has a bit of a wrinkle. Turns out Crosby only dinged the dryer when he missed his real target, a regulation goal that sat next to the appliance in the basement of his childhood home in Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia. "I was always *aiming* for the net," says Crosby, the NHL points leader through March 11. "It's probably not a good thing that I missed that much." The machine somehow continued to function until it was critically damaged during filming of the commercial in 2009. Now it resides in the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame. "I figured that dryer would stop working eventually," says Crosby, 25. "I'm surprised it lasted as long as it did." —DOUG McINTYRE

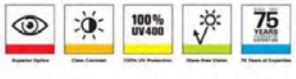
photograph by BRIAN KLUTCH

Rewrite The Rules.™
FIN®
Electronic Cigarettes
GASOline
REDEEM YOUR $5 OFF COUPON AT FINCIGS.COM/ESPN
FIN
Electronic Cigarettes

© 2013 Safilo USA . All rights reserved . Style: X4308/s



PERFECT VISION.



Available at solsticesunglasses.com

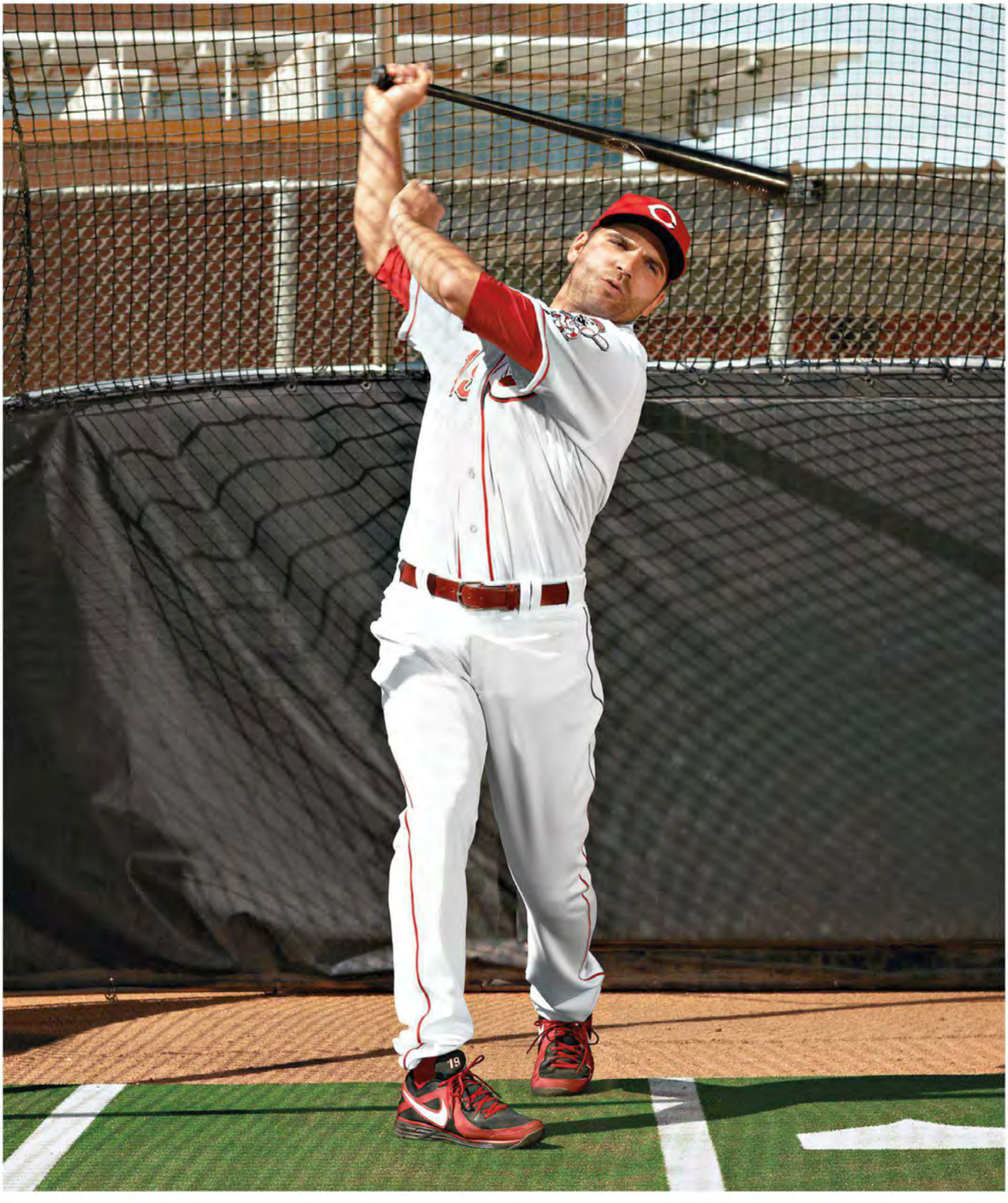
Polaroid
Polarized Sunglasses

MLB PREVIEW

WHO KNEW? Who among the people sitting in Dayton's Fifth Third Field in the summer of 2003 knew that this kid from Etobicoke, Ontario, whiffing on every third at-bat, would one day become NL MVP? (Page 42.) Who watching Yaz in 1967 thought it would be 45 years before the next Triple Crown winner came along? (Page 90.) How many of the 133 baseball writers who made predictions in 2012 foresaw the Orioles or A's in the playoffs, or the Giants starting 2013 as defending champs? (Answer: none and one.) Baseball has always been a game in which anything can happen. But now, according to brave new analytics (page 52), anything is twice as likely to happen as it was before. History is no longer a guarantee of success—just ask the Yankees. Neither is payroll, but don't tell that to the Angels or Dodgers. (Page 78.) Nowadays, with smarter front offices and an extra wild card, any fan, even a Cubs fan, has reasonable hope. As this preview illustrates, the best thing about baseball is getting better.

WATCH THE *BASEBALL TONIGHT/ESPN THE MAGAZINE* MLB PREVIEW SHOW ON ESPN2, THURSDAY, MARCH 21, AT 10 P.M. ET.

Illustration by TAVIS COBURN; type by TWO ARMS INC.



photographs by DYLAN COULTER; illustration by KEVIN SPROULS

THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

BY BUSTER OLNEY

ALMOST ALL HITTERS REDUCE THE GAME TO ITS SIMPLEST PARTS. ALMOST ALL HITTERS ARE NOT **JOEY VOTTO**.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

No player is immune from a bad year. But as any fantasy player will tell you, it's invaluable to know who is likely to bounce back. To get inside the game's ups and downs, *The Mag* asked Dan Szymborski for a new metric that shows fans a player's potential for erratic production. Joey Votto's index heading into 2013? A reliable, near-league-average 1.03 (where 0 is completely predictable and 2 is anything but). That's remarkable given Votto's comeback from an injury-plagued 2012.

MORE ON THE UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX FOR TEAMS AND PLAYERS ON PAGE 55

the middle of a game last summer, Joey Votto walked over to teammate Todd Frazier in the Reds' dugout and apologized. It had nothing to do with anything that had happened on the field. In fact, Votto was on the DL with a left knee injury, and Frazier, an infielder, wasn't in the lineup that day. Votto took advantage of the opportunity to simply tell Frazier he was sorry for not investing the time to get to know his teammate. "I take the blame for this," Votto said. "I don't know you that well, and I want to get to know you better."

The apology surprised Frazier but not nearly as much as the fact that Votto had approached him at all. Votto doesn't talk much in the clubhouse and always seems preoccupied. So Frazier saw an opening and took it. "Joe, since we're speaking the truth here," he said, "you're a little different. But I respect you 10 times more for coming up and talking with me."

Votto's teammates understand the 29-year-old first baseman in the way most of us comprehend the universe: He's reliable and omnipresent, but at the same time he's so remote and deep that they aren't entirely sure what makes him work. They are in awe of him, his prowess and erudition as a hitter, and how much emotional and physical effort he puts into each pitch of each at-bat of each game.

The vast majority of major league hitters prefer to simplify the endless information streams available to them—the video of opposing pitchers, the scouting reports, the statistical data—and reduce all of it to the lowest common denominator: See the ball, hit the ball. Anything more and most players would crash due to mental overload. But much like another great student of hitting, Ted Williams, Votto has an insatiable appetite for intel about his swing and pitchers, and because of it he's arguably the best pure hitter of the iPad generation. He thinks about hitting uniquely and articulates each insight in a steady voice so deliberate it sounds as if it's coming from a GPS unit.

"It's all about reframing the challenge," he said last summer when we talked hitting at Great American Ball Park's indoor batting cage. "I've stopped caring about runs and RBIs. I care more about how high a percentage of productive at-bats I can have, how consistently tough and competitive I can be for the opposing pitcher. That's my goal every single time I go up there. If I drive in 90 runs, I don't care. I know a lot of old-school people wouldn't believe I'd say something like that."

He paused for a moment and continued: "If you can find a way to frame the fight to be patient as a challenge in and of itself, that can be more satisfying than catching a ball the right way and shooting it through the gap or out of the ballpark. As hitters grow and get older, those are the battles that are so gratifying."

There are many ways to define how great a hitter Votto is. The easy way is to say that he's a three-time All-Star and won the National League Most Valuable Player Award in 2010. For the SABR set, there's this: Using the advanced metric Adjusted OPS-plus, which takes a player's OPS and adjusts for the ballpark and the league in which he plays, Votto rates as the offensive equal of Hank Aaron and Joe DiMaggio and is just

PAGE 43 ILLUSTRATION PHOTO REFERENCE: THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

> I CARE MORE HOW CONSISTENTLY TOUGH AND COMPETITIVE I CAN BE FOR THE OPPOSING PITCHER, **AND THAT'S MY GOAL EVERY SINGLE TIME I GO UP THERE.**

LEADERS IN WIN PROBABILITY ADDED

Over the past five years, Votto has led MLB in Win Probability Added (WPA), which measures how much the play of each MLBer contributed to his team's wins. Last season, even with a knee injury, Votto paced the majors in WPA at 6.0.

RANK	WPA*
1 Joey Votto	28.194
2 Albert Pujols	27.240
3 Prince Fielder	26.106
4 Miguel Cabrera	24.731
5 Ryan Braun	22.850

*MINIMUM 2,500 PLATE APPEARANCES

HIGHEST ON-BASE PLUS SLUGGING PERCENTAGE

Votto is in esteemed company when examining the OPS of lefthanded hitters in their first six seasons (minimum 3,000 plate appearances).

RANK	OPS*
1 Ted Williams	1.13
2 Chuck Klein	1.04
3 Todd Helton	1.03
4 Johnny Mize	1.02
5 Joey Votto	0.97

*SOURCE: BASEBALL-REFERENCE.COM

BATTING AVERAGE WITH RUNNERS IN SCORING POSITION

Since 2008 Votto has led the majors in BA with RISP (minimum 500 at-bats). Votto ranks ahead of a Triple Crown winner (Miguel Cabrera) and two other MVPs (Joe Mauer and Albert Pujols).

.349

a tick better than Frank Robinson. But maybe the best way to describe Votto is that he's baseball's most cerebral hitter, the Einstein of the batter's box.

WHEN I ARRIVED at Reds camp this spring, I mentioned to second baseman Brandon Phillips that I came to talk to Votto about hitting. Phillips laughed. "I hope you have a lot of time," he said.

Votto's teammates know his passion for every at-bat, but not much else. The outline of his mouth is often as flat as a pancake, and even if his eyes are open, those around him often can't tell whether he's looking at anything in particular. This is the Votto Stare. His teammates don't know whether he's musing about something he read or the workout ahead. But they are certain that he's thinking—a lot—because Votto doesn't really do light and breezy.

"He's a pretty quiet guy, pretty to himself," rightfielder Jay Bruce says. "He doesn't let a lot of people in, but I would consider him a friend." Bruce adds that Votto can be funny once he gets to know you. And his social distance has never been a clubhouse hindrance. Before the 2012 season, the Reds negotiated a 12-year, $251.5 million deal with Votto's agent, Danny Lozano—the longest contract in baseball history. "There was never any doubt about his personality and whether he would live up to his end," Cincinnati general manager Walt Jocketty says.

Jocketty knew because of moments like this: When Cuban defector Aroldis Chapman joined the Reds for his first full season in 2011, it seemed wrong to Votto that he was unable to communicate with a pitcher integral to the team's future. Votto had learned French as a kid and felt there were enough similarities between that language and Spanish that he could grasp it quickly. During the 2011 offseason, he worked with a Spanish tutor four or five times a week. By spring training last year, he spoke his third language well enough to challenge Chapman to a duel: He would speak Spanish better than Chapman could speak English. The pitcher accepted. Votto won't say who won, but don't bet against the guy who still Skypes with his Spanish tutor.

G.I.JOE
RETALIATION
MARCH 28
IN THEATRES, real D 3D AND IMAX 3D
GIJOEMOVIE.COM

His attention is all-consuming. The first time I met Votto, he stared intently at his phone and asked me politely to wait, and then he looked up and called me over. He had been playing Words With Friends. He is a voracious reader. This spring, poring through metrics guru Nate Silver's book, *The Signal and the Noise*, Votto noticed Silver making reference to *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, by Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize winner in economics. Votto read that when he finished Silver's book.

From Kahneman, Votto learned that one's cognitive awareness consists of two modes of thinking: One is fast and instinctive, the other slower and more thoughtful. Both reflect Votto's approach to hitting.

DEREK JETER HAS amassed more than 3,000 career hits by asking for one primary piece of information: How hard is the pitcher's fastball? In the past, he's gotten a signal from a scout in the stands—two fingers for 92 mph, three fingers for 93 mph and so on—and this allowed him to gauge the speed. Like most big league hitters, everything for Jeter is predicated on feasting on fastballs.

Votto, on the other hand, is an omnivore at the plate. He looks for all types of pitches throughout the count. "I'm a firm believer that I can handle just about every pitch in every part of the zone as long as I can anticipate on them and execute on them," he says.

Barry Bonds hit this way. Manny Ramirez too. Miguel Cabrera anticipates pitches, but this strategy is rare. If a hitter guesses wrong on a breaking ball, he is left flailing at fastballs buried deep in the catcher's mitt.

VOTTO LIKES TO TRY TO THINK ALONG WITH THE PITCHER, TO GUESS EXACTLY WHAT PITCH IS BEING THROWN NEXT AND WHERE.
"IT'S AMAZING. HE DOESN'T MISS HIS PITCH."

REDS HITTING COACH BROOK JACOBY (PICTURED ABOVE)

Votto studies pitchers vigorously, watching videotape and reading scouting reports to diagnose what they are likely to throw in every situation, something that, say, Jeter is loath to do. Just as important, Votto studies the location pitchers favor, which virtually no one else in the game does. His perspective changes as he goes deeper into an at-bat. "I start off at the very beginning of the at-bat with the highest expectation of success with whatever pitch is available to me ... and then I shrink it down as the strikes dwindle," he says, meaning he will do as much damage as the count allows. "I get one strike and I shrink down my expectations and my swing slightly."

As the count deepens, he chokes up on the bat a little; while he was thinking about driving a ball earlier in the count, now he's more focused on putting it in play, hard. He spreads out his stance slightly, like a football lineman

AL BEHRMAN/AP IMAGES

DOES THIS MAN LOOK LIKE A NO. 5 STARTER?

ON THE LAST day of February and the first day of the rest of his career, Aroldis Chapman did something he rarely does before taking the mound: He jumped over the foul line. But in this instance, it was one small step for a Red and perhaps one giant leap for Redkind.

When last we saw him, Chapman was one of the most dominant closers in the game: 38 saves, a 1.51 ERA, 122 K's and 23 walks in 71⅔ innings. But the day after Cincinnati lost to San Francisco in the division series, the Reds brain trust met and decided to return the lefthander to the starting role it originally envisioned for him, back in January 2010, when it gave the Cuban defector a six-year, $30.25 million contract.

The decision has been met with more head-scratching than applause. In the media lunchroom at the Salt River ballpark in Scottsdale, Ariz., where the Rockies were hosting the Reds in the split-squad game that was to be Chapman's spring debut, a couple of scouts got to talking about the move.

"I don't quite get it," an AL scout said. "They're taking a guy who locks down the ninth inning and turning him into a fifth starter. They're fixing something that wasn't broke."

"My question is whether Chapman has a third pitch to go with his fastball and slider," an NL scout said. "If he doesn't, the hitters will catch up to him quick."

Their skepticism is shared by Reds manager Dusty Baker, who has openly campaigned this spring for Chapman to remain in the bullpen. But Baker works for GM Walt Jocketty, who says, "We think he has the potential to be an elite starting pitcher." Last season, among hurlers with at least 60 innings, Chapman's 5.3-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio was seventh best in baseball, and his 15.3 K's/9 IP ranked second. "We made him a reliever out of necessity last year," Jocketty says, "but now we have Jonathan Broxton to close." Asked whether the disastrous reliever-to-starter conversion of the Red Sox's Daniel Bard last season gave him pause, the veteran executive says, "It worked out pretty well when we made Adam Wainwright a starter in St. Louis." By mid-March, Baker and Jocketty remained at odds over Chapman's role.

Baseball analytics tend to support Jocketty: Relievers have lower WAR values than starters do. (Compare Chapman's 3.6 in 2012 with Reds ace Johnny Cueto's 5.8.) For Cincinnati pitching coach Bryan Price, though, it's not just about statistics. "I think we owe it to him to test his potential," he says. "Now is the time to ask, 'What if?' Not a few years down the road, when it might be too late."

The 25-year-old Chapman certainly has the arm. The question is whether he has the maturity to be an ace. His personal life has been kind of a mess: a lawsuit filed by his former agent, several speeding tickets in multiple states and a suspended license.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX
Chapman's volatility score is higher than average, assuming his move to the rotation.

Chapman's initial 137 big league appearances came out of the bullpen. Now hitters might see a lot more of him.

There was nothing messy about his debut, though. He retired all six Rockies he faced, and of his 23 pitches, 20 were strikes. His fastball topped out at 94, far short of the speed that inspired his "MPH 105" license plate but perfectly normal for a first outing. More important, he showed off an effective changeup.

Afterward Chapman said he was ready: "I feel I could locate the pitches where I want. The results, you saw what happened ... I was really happy."

Happy is good. But happily ever after is what the Reds really want. —STEVE WULF

JAKE ROTH/USA TODAY SPORTS

WATCH VOTTO TALK HITTING ON THE BASEBALL TONIGHT: ESPN THE MAGAZINE MLB PREVIEW SHOW ON ESPN2, THURSDAY, MARCH 21, AT 10 P.M. ET.

digging in. "When I get two strikes," he says, "I open up [the pitch possibilities] to just about everything and try to do less with the ball."

With this approach, he is a lethal two-strike hitter. During a 2012 season that was sabotaged by midseason knee surgery, Votto had a .394 on-base percentage in plate appearances that reached two strikes. Among hitters with at least 200 plate appearances, that was best in the major leagues.

When Votto is on the bench watching other hitters, Reds hitting coach Brook Jacoby has heard him predict pitch sequences, as if he is inside the head of the pitcher—not only the pitch type but the location. "It's amazing," Jacoby says. "When he's in that zone and able to do that, nobody gets him out. He doesn't miss his pitch."

In effect, Votto stalks pitchers, and opponents know it. Against the Cardinals, he and catcher Yadier Molina—who's known to have an imaginative approach to pitch calling—keep a good-natured running banter, like the last two poker players at the table. *That pitch surprised me*, Votto will say to Molina. Or, *He'd better not throw that again.* Dodgers catcher A.J. Ellis adds via email: "From my crouch, I can feel his mind grinding and turning and thinking his way through the at-bat. Most every hitter has set patterns, and there are safe places to go to attack their weaknesses. If the pitcher is able to execute, we should be successful and limit the damage. With Votto, well-executed pitches often end up driven into gaps and even over the fence. You can *never* pitch with a set pattern, and rarely should you repeat pitches in the same location. He is too good."

VOTTO GREW UP in Toronto, the son of a chef and a sommelier and the oldest of four siblings. He focused on baseball over hockey, he says, because baseball was less expensive and fit his parents' schedule; they couldn't drive him to 4:30 a.m. hockey practices. As a teenager, he was given Ted Williams' book *The Science of Hitting* and was fascinated by the single-minded challenge of solving a pitcher's intent. It fit an introvert like him.

He hit well enough in high school to be drafted in the second round by the Reds in 2002, but he wasn't necessarily regarded as a can't-miss prospect. He wasn't a prolific home run hitter, and there were questions about his defense. In fact, after Votto had spent six seasons in the minors, Cincinnati penciled in Scott Hatteberg to start at first base going into the 2008 season. Dusty Baker, the new Reds manager that spring, knew Votto's reputation for being very quiet and rather odd—but Baker loved his swing, and soon he was starting.

Before long he was doing damage at the plate and being touted as a Rookie of the Year candidate. And then, that summer, his father, Joseph Votto, died unexpectedly at age 52. Joey was devastated. In fact, in the summer of 2009, he left baseball for about a month, saying upon his return that he'd been treated for anxiety and depression. I had been told he didn't talk about his father, so his answer to a question about when he became such a passionate hitter surprised me.

Legal Notice

If You Currently or Previously Owned, Purchased, or Leased Certain Toyota, Lexus, or Scion Vehicles,

You Could Get Benefits from a Class Action Settlement.

There is a proposed settlement in a class action lawsuit against Toyota Motor Corp. and Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. ("Toyota") concerning certain vehicles with electronic throttle control systems ("ETCS"). Those included in the settlement have legal rights and options and deadlines by which they must exercise them.

What is the lawsuit about?

The lawsuit alleges that certain Toyota, Lexus, and Scion vehicles equipped with ETCS are defective and can experience unintended acceleration. Toyota denies that it has violated any law, denies that it engaged in any and all wrongdoing, and denies that its ETCS is defective. The Court did not decide which side was right. Instead, the parties decided to settle.

Am I Included in the proposed settlement?

Subject to certain limited exclusions, you are included if as of **December 28, 2012**,

- You own or owned, purchase(d), and/or lease(d) a "Subject Vehicle" that was
- Distributed for sale or lease in any of the fifty States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and all other United States territories and/or possessions or
- Were a company that insured Subject Vehicles for residual value.

The Subject Vehicles are identified at the settlement website and in the full settlement notice available on the website or through the toll-free number below. The class includes persons, entities and/or organizations.

This settlement does not involve claims of personal injury or property damage.

What does the settlement provide?

The proposed settlement provides for: (a) cash payments from two funds totaling $500 million for certain eligible class members; (b) free installation of a brake override system on certain Subject Vehicles; (c) a customer support program to correct any defect in materials or workmanship of certain vehicle parts for other eligible class members; and (d) at least $30 million toward automobile safety research and education. Some of these benefits require action by class members by or before certain deadlines.

Payments will vary depending upon several factors such as the number of claims submitted, the amounts claimed, and other adjustments and deductions.

What are my options?

If you do nothing, you will remain in the class and will not be able to sue Toyota about the issues in the lawsuit, but you may not receive certain cash benefits for which you may be eligible.

You can exclude yourself by **May 13, 2013**, if you don't want to be part of the settlement. You won't get any settlement benefits, but you keep the right to sue Toyota about the issues in the lawsuit.

You can submit a claim form by **July 29, 2013**, if you don't exclude yourself, for any cash benefits for which you are eligible and which require a claim form.

You can object to all or part of the settlement by **May 13, 2013**, if you don't exclude yourself.

The full settlement notice describes how to exclude yourself, submit a claim form and/or object.

The Court will hold a fairness hearing on **June 14, 2013 at 9:00 a.m.** to (a) consider whether the proposed settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate and (b) decide the plaintiffs' lawyers' request for fees up to $200 million and expenses up to $27 million and other awards for Named Plaintiffs and Class Representatives. You may appear at the hearing, but you are not required to and you may hire an attorney to appear for you, at your own expense.

For more information or a claim form:
1-877-283-0507 www.toyotaelsettlement.com

"A lot of it had to do with when my dad died," he said. "I genuinely feel like I went through hell when my dad died, and I'm more grateful for simple things, and my job, and the fans. The core of me has changed since my dad died."

Votto believes that he learned a lot and that devoting himself to his craft seemed simple in comparison. He speaks slowly about this, choosing his words carefully. "I feel like getting prepared is the least I can do. I don't want to say I'm super mentally tough or anything like that. But when I listen to Kobe Bryant speak about no excuses, he's so intense, so consistent, and he doesn't stop. I can relate to that. Because what I've experienced in the past, this"—meaning baseball—"is nothing compared to that. It's easy.

"So I ask a high level of myself. I ask it right at the beginning of the offseason, I ask it in spring training; I don't go through the motions, because I try to be a great player. I want to be the best player in the game, and I feel like I have the potential to do that. It takes a special effort to be at the top."

In that period of introspection, Votto thought about the quality of his at-bats and how intense he was for crucial ones in the later innings but didn't carry that same approach throughout the game. "That feeling that I have in those adrenaline-filled moments, or in those big situations when the game is on the line, that's how I prepare to feel, from the very first pitch of the game," Votto says. "In the past ... I would feel great by my fifth at-bat in a game. I asked myself, Why? Why is that? How could you give up roughly 20% of your appearances if you're not feeling great or it's cold outside?"

So Votto devised a regimen before the first pitch of each game to ramp up emotionally. And that explains his pregame demeanor. "I don't interact a lot," Votto says, "because I'm saving emotional energy." In addition to the two usual sets of batting practice that most players take—one in the cage and one on the field—Votto also does a flip drill, with the ball being tossed to him. He'll swing for three to six minutes, anticipating specific pitches in specific spots from specific pitchers, working at game pace to lock down his swing. This way he ensures that he is physically and psychologically working at ninth-inning speed at the start of the game.

26.2

THE BOTTOM LINE

That's Votto's WAR over the past five seasons, which ranks second among lefthanded hitters. [Chase Utley is first.]

"He just takes it to another level, basically," Frazier says. "When he's done, he's exhausted. He's so tired that you don't think he can play in the game. But then he does what he does in the game, with the focus level that he has. That's why he's the hitter he is. I wish I could take that approach. But for me, I'm just trying to relax as much as I can. Joey's trying to speed it up."

Says Votto: "I gave away too many first at-bats because I wasn't completely prepared, and I was just kind of working myself into the game. I found I lost a batting title because of that. I missed out on opportunities to drive in teammates. Maybe we lost a game 2-1, and we had second and third, and I missed an opportunity because I wasn't completely prepared."

So now, before a game or even during it, he jots down memos on pitchers. He hands them to a video attendant, and they're logged into a computer. He'll go through a smorgasbord of notes, the videotape and scouting reports, in addition to the daily refinement of his swing. Once in the box, if there is any doubt or clutter between pitches, he will take time to fix it.

"If he's not focusing on the right things or something's popped into his head during an at-bat, he'll get out of the box and try to clear his head, refocus," says Jacoby, the Reds hitting coach. "Most guys will stay in [the batter's box] and end up having a poor at-bat."

Votto explains, "If I'm ever feeling ambiguous about that pitch, I try to reset myself and think about what the next pitch is going to be." If he can't develop a clear vision, he'll "pull the parachute." By that, he means going to his two-strike approach of a lowered expectation and a cut-down swing.

Votto could be a great hitting resource for his teammates, but it's almost as if his language is a personalized Latin, something that others can't understand. Nationals shortstop Ian Desmond says he once asked Votto a question about his approach at the plate with two strikes. Desmond doesn't remember the answer, only that it was heavy on the details—almost too many to be absorbed. He nearly had to walk away. Sometimes teammates ask Votto questions about a pitcher, about a sequence to come. But he almost never quizzes them.

Instead, he talks about other things—"real-life things," Bruce says. In the half-hour conversation that Votto and Frazier had in the dugout last summer, they covered a lot of ground, even veering into nature vs. nurture and an assessment of their own personalities.

Frazier has a quick wit; he's the type of guy who could be launched into the middle of a North Korea cabinet meeting and have everybody laughing within five minutes. "Todd," Votto asked that day in the dugout, "how do you do that all the time?"

"How do you stay reserved all the time?" Frazier countered.

"I can't have that personality like you," Votto said. "I think you're born with that personality."

Maybe. But if anyone is a meld of nature and nurture, intense and intensely curious, it is Joey Votto. ■

KIRBY LEE/IMAGE OF SPORT/USA TODAY SPORTS

skechers PERFORMANCE™ DIVISION
THE OFFICIAL SHOE OF MEB. AMERICA'S #1 MARATHON RUNNER.
skechersperformance.com
facebook.com/skechersperformance
Available at
Academy
SPORTS+OUTDOORS
and Fine stores everywhere
skechers
GO run 2

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

0 1 2

1.43

At 25, Justin Upton has survived killer seasons, punch-and-judy seasons and a trade this winter. No wonder the new Brave rates far higher than league average (1.0) on our measure of how unpredictable his production will be.

TURN TO PAGE 57 FOR A PREVIEW OF HOW THE SEASON WILL PLAY OUT FOR UPTON AND THE BRAVES.

THERE'S ALWAYS THIS YEAR

"Hey, Justin, our new unis are sweet!"

SEE MORE OF JOSH HAMILTON AND THE ANGELS ON PAGE 78.

WHAT WOULD A BASEBALL SEASON LOOK LIKE IF (ALMOST) EVERY TEAM COULD WIN IT ALL? JUST LIKE THIS ONE. WELCOME TO THE GOLDEN AGE OF **"I DID NOT SEE THAT COMING."**

BY DAVE CAMERON

GOOGLE THE PHRASE "There's always next year" and the top result is the Wikipedia entry for *The Cubs Fan's Guide to Happiness*, a manual for surviving the unrelenting misery of rooting for Chicago's longest-suffering team. Irony has apparently been factored into Google's algorithms.

There's always next year. It's the baseball lie that keeps on giving. Ever since the Cincinnati Red Stockings ran the table in 1869 (57 wins, zero losses, five world-class mustaches), there have been winning franchises, losing franchises and little hope of the latter becoming the former. Baseball arrived broken the moment it was born. We all know that of the 108 World Series played, the Yankees have won 27—a ring for each inaugural speech since William Howard Taft's. In fact, all told, eight franchises have amassed 75 titles, leaving just 33 for the remaining 22 teams to split. For the have-nots, next year almost never comes—and when it comes, it rarely comes again.

And yet ... If you've paid attention the past few years, you've noticed something surprising: actual surprises. The Red Sox squandering a nine-game lead in September 2011 and the Braves blowing 8½ games in the last 23 days of that month. The collapse

photograph by POUYA DIANAT
JOHN HUET (HAMILTON)

378 The number of preseason picks of pennant winners by ESPN experts between 2007 and 2012.

22 The number of those picks that were correct (5.8%).

2 The most correct picks by any ESPN prognosticator in that period (tie: Enrique Rojas, Jayson Stark and Jim Caple).

of the 2012 Rangers. The shocking runs of the 2012 Orioles and A's. *Everything* about the Nationals.

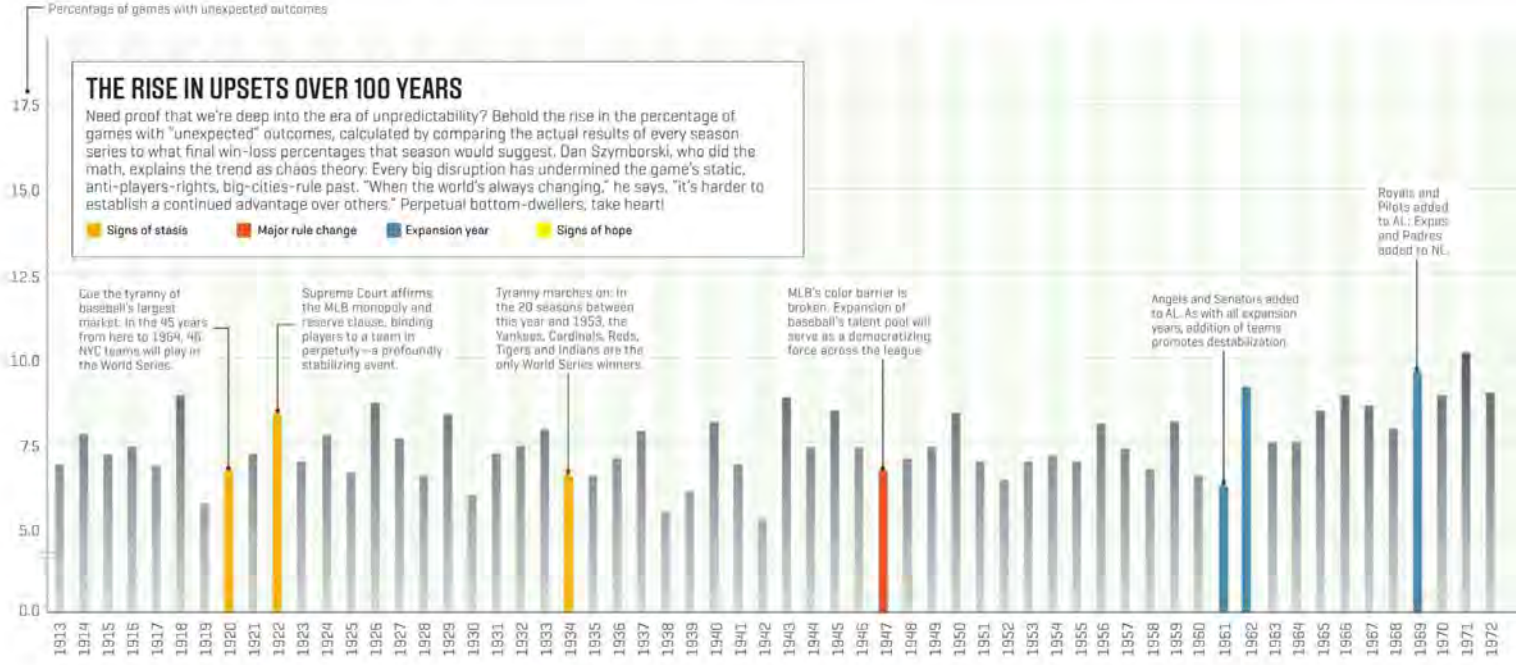
How could this be? Was it not a decade earlier that competitive balance had fallen and could not get up? Had commissioner Bud Selig not declared at a November 2000 Senate hearing on MLB's economic issues: "At the start of spring training, there no longer exists hope and faith for the fans of more than half our 30 clubs"? And was it not two seasons later that Billy Beane managed to steer his low-revenue A's to regular-season success, an outcome so surprising it inspired Michael Lewis to write a book? We all remember the first mashed-up word of the title—*Moneyball*. But the part after the colon was equally telling: *The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*. You couldn't write a baseball tome at the turn of the century without citing inherent unfairness on the cover.

Is it possible that without anyone noticing it, one of sports' biggest crises had been resolved? That's what Dan Szymborski, creator of ZiPS Projections and one of the pioneers of predictive sports modeling, was wondering this offseason. And so he set about crunching the numbers, beginning with broad strokes, studying seasonal records to determine a "coefficient of determination of prior success," or how well the win-loss rate of every team in history could be predicted by its record the previous season. What he found was telling: During baseball's dead ball era, you could explain 37% of a team's record by its previous one. That number rose to 53% in the '50s. But since 2000, it has dropped back to 31%, evidence for Szymborski that baseball is far less predictable than it was 50 years ago.

Then Szymborski turned the telescope around, focusing on individual games. Based on how each team had finished each season, he predicted the winning percentage for every team in every season against every team it had played—12,917 season series since 1901. He compared that with the actual results of season series to determine what percentage of wins and losses in a season were in essence upsets. The results (see chart below) showed that those percentages have gradually doubled. "The unexpected," Szymborski says, "is becoming more expected."

There's something in economics called a feedback loop, a chain of reinforcing events, each one magnifying the effects of the last. Loops that heighten negative trends—think hyperinflation or the Kardashians—are called vicious cycles. Ones that multiply positive effects are called virtuous cycles. And in the pantheon of virtuous cycles, the trend toward "anything can happen" in baseball is a classic.

Here's how you build one: Start with a massive expansion of the talent pool by eliminating racial barriers to entry. Expand your league to almost twice its size while increasing postseason berths from two to 10. Create a dynasty-defying free agency system. Establish revenue-sharing and a luxury tax, squeezing payrolls toward the mean. Institute testing for PEDs, lessening the ability of high-revenue teams to buy inflated late-career production. Shepherd in analytics that allow poorer teams to level the market for player value. And then, when it begins to take hold, witness the astonishing shift of the mindset of your players, fans, managers, GMs and owners.



THE RISE IN UPSETS OVER 100 YEARS

Need proof that we're deep into the era of unpredictability? Behold the rise in the percentage of games with "unexpected" outcomes, calculated by comparing the actual results of every season series to what final win-loss percentages that season would suggest. Dan Szymborski, who did the math, explains the trend as chaos theory: Every big disruption has undermined the game's static, anti-players-rights, big-cities-rule past. "When the world's always changing," he says, "it's harder to establish a continued advantage over others." Perpetual bottom-dwellers, take heart!

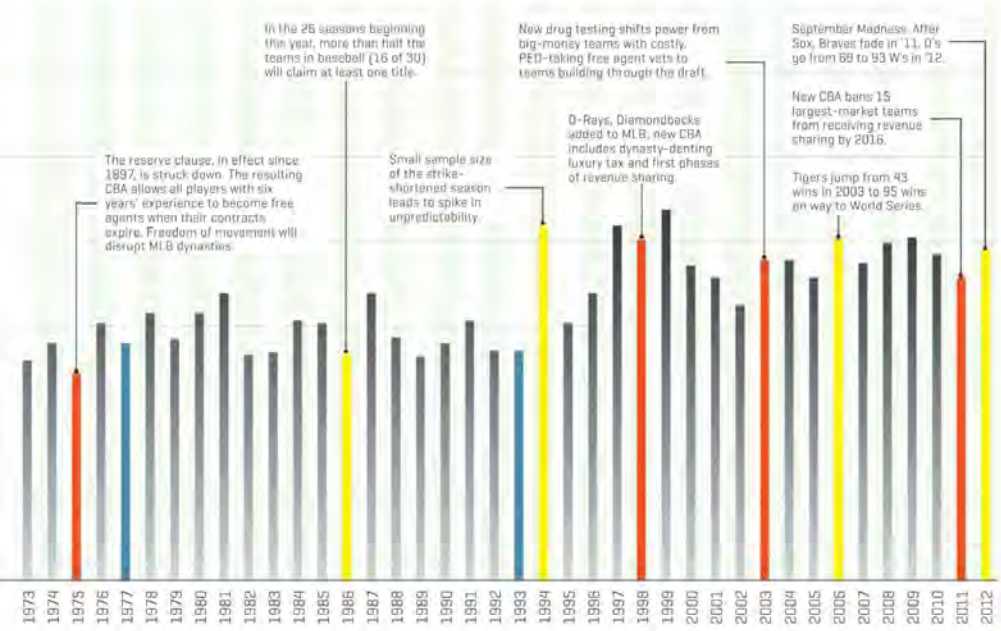
The Mag's picks to make the 2013 Series: Tigers and Nationals

The Mag's pick to win it all:
NATIONALS

As one American League GM told me in March: "As we sit here today in the middle of spring training, you can count on one hand the clubs without a puncher's chance of reaching the likely win threshold to at least compete for the second wild card." Just as despair and disillusionment are self-fulfilling prophecies, when everyone acts like they have a chance to win, everyone does have a chance to win. And GMs who think they can win do different things—like fielding competitive rosters throughout September, as opposed to using the month as a camp for their minor league system. Which increases the odds that front-running teams will lose more games that month. Which, in turn, increases the chances of late-season collapses and justifies small-market teams signing their stars to long-term contracts. Like Seattle making Felix Hernandez the highest-paid pitcher in history. The Reds locking up Joey Votto. The Brewers signing Ryan Braun. The Rockies nailing down Troy Tulowitzki. The Twins tying the knot with Joe Mauer.

One might even call it ... a virtuous cycle. As Selig noted to *The Mag* in March, nine teams have won the Series in the past 12 years, and 26 have made the playoffs in the past 10. "When I look at the teams across baseball," Selig says, "we have no idea who is going to win this year." One can, indeed, make a case that 25 of the 30 teams have a reasonable shot at the playoffs. (The tear-down Astros, Marlins and Twins would require divine intervention to do so; the Cubs and Rockies would need just a minor miracle instead of a biblical one.) Even the offseason is a bizarro version of its former self, with the Indians and Pirates signing away Nick Swisher and Russell Martin, respectively, from the Yankees, exacting revenge for the years of pillaging they'd been subjected to.

It's all combined to produce seasons that make a mockery of, well, predictions. In 2011 *The New York Times* reviewed the preseason picks of 108 experts. Not one had tabbed the Cards as champs. Last year none of 133 pundits picked the A's or Orioles to make the playoffs; only one picked the Giants to win it all. In other words, we all now stink at guessing what will happen. Which is an ironic note for an MLB Preview Issue ... but a very good thing for baseball.



JOHN LOOMIS (3)

TURN THE PAGE FOR

TEAM-BY-TEAM PROJECTIONS ...

Baseball has become so unpredictable that we needed to invent an entirely new way of guessing what will happen next. On the following pages you'll see Insider **DAN SZYMBORSKI**'s projections for the likely range of every team's wins (see fig. A), based on projections for every player on every roster. Why Dan, why now? Because since he started doing this 10 years ago, Dan's median prediction has been accurate within 6.5 wins, on average.

Meanwhile, *The Mag*'s senior writer **TIM KURKJIAN** predicts division standings, including wild-card teams, and offers up the breakdowns that show how Szymborski's best- and worst-case scenarios will play out.

(FIG. A)

... AND A SUREFIRE WAY TO PREDICT THE UNPREDICTABLE

Any Joe Schmo can make predictions (and will probably be wrong). But we are realists here at *The Mag*. And in this era of out-of-nowhere franchises and good teams gone bad, we want you to get a true picture of the season's ups, downs and flatlines. We asked Szymborski to create a new metric, the **UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX**, which gauges what version of hope fans of every team should have. The metric is an offshoot of Szymborski's ZiPS system—a sabermetric standard-bearer that factors in age, injury history and statistical highs and lows going back four years, and makes its projections based on database comparisons across MLB history. With it, he sums up the volatility from 0 (what you see is what you get) to 2 (who knows). (See fig. B.) Alongside profiles of pivotal players by *The Mag*'s **DOUG MITTLER** and commentary by *Baseball Tonight* mainstays like **CURT SCHILLING** and **KARL RAVECH**, this preview sets a fan's expectations right.

(FIG. B)

1

WASHINGTON NATIONALS

PROJECTED WINS

50 — 88 LOW — 98 HIGH

98 WINS IF ... After logging more bases than any other teenager in MLB history, Harper wins the MVP in his first full season, while Strasburg leads the rotation with 220 innings and 20 wins. The Nats' loaded bullpen (eighth in ERA before adding Soriano) ends games after six innings, and the infield defense is the best in the game thanks to a tandem of Gold Gloves at the corners in Adam LaRoche and Ryan Zimmerman.

88 WINS IF ... Last season's NLDS collapse is still on their minds, Strasburg gets hurt again, Zimmerman's shoulder keeps him off the hot corner, Harper can't get out of his postseason slump (3-for-23!) and Denard Span gets nowhere near his career-best OBP, .392 in 2009.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Gauges the volatility of each team and its pivotal player from 0 (what you see is what you get) to 2 (who knows).

NATIONALS

With Stephen Strasburg and Bryce Harper safer bets than last year and the team as a whole deeper going into this season, the Nats are both a very good team and one lacking a major downside.

RAFAEL SORIANO

It was the bullpen—not Strasburg's shutdown—that kept the Nats from the NLCS last season. So they'll need the closer to douse flames the way he did with the Yankees (42 saves) last season and hope his eight career trips to the DL doesn't mean durability issues.

"THIS IS THE MOST TALENTED TEAM IN THE NATIONAL LEAGUE. THIS IS THE TEAM TO BEAT IN THE EAST, AND THEY COULD HAVE A BRAVES-LIKE RUN IN THEM FOR THE NEXT FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT OR NINE YEARS."
—CURT SCHILLING

RAFAEL SORIANO

2 WILD CARD ATLANTA BRAVES

JUSTIN UPTON

50 — 85 LOW — 97 HIGH

97 WINS IF ... Closer Craig Kimbrel and the bullpen dominate even more than last year (2.76 ERA, second in MLB), and an Upton HR race and fast start by Jason Heyward ignite the O.

85 WINS IF ... The Uptons combine for personal lows (.240 BA, 350 K's), the Braves sorely miss Chipper's career 13.3 strikeout rate and Brandon Beachy's arm, and they can't build on 23 straight wins when Kris Medlen starts.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Braves **1.44**
Justin Upton **1.43**

0 — 1 — 2

BRAVES

The Uptons aren't the only question. Atlanta's rotation lacks the depth it had last season, especially without Beachy to start the season. But that bullpen! Atlanta's relievers could give the Nats pen—not to mention those Cincy Nasty Boys—a run for its money.

JUSTIN UPTON

Did Arizona GM Kevin Towers want Upton out of the desert due to his decline in power? He hit 17 homers last season, down from 31 in 2011, and his SLG plummeted to .430. But he's only 25 and has solid career numbers at Turner Field (.293/.388/.463).

"NOT JUST OFFENSIVELY, BUT ALSO DEFENSIVELY, THIS COULD BE AN OUTFIELD LIKE WE'VE NEVER SEEN." —SCHILLING

3 PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

ROY HALLADAY

50 — 74 LOW — 87 HIGH — 100

87 WINS IF ... Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee and Cole Hamels combine for 63 wins—13 more than they had in 2011, new 3B Michael Young recovers from a career-low .370 SLG and Ryan Howard returns to 40-homer form.

74 WINS IF ... Delmon Young's ankle ruins his first half, Michael Young plays like he did last year—the second-worst 3B, according to ultimate zone rating (UZR)—and new leadoff man Ben Revere flounders.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Phillies **1.47**
Roy Halladay **1.41**

0 — 1 — 2

PHILLIES

If a dynasty is a mountain, Philly is descending to base camp. But if Revere can improve on his .675 OPS and 40 steals, and the real Halladay returns and is part of a solid starting trio, the Phils just might find enough oxygen to make another climb.

ROY HALLADAY

How valuable is a healthy Doc? The Phils went 14-27 with their ace on the DL last summer. Then he came back, and his 6.84 ERA and 2.33 K/BB ratio in September raised concerns that the 15-year veteran's shoulder injury wasn't fully behind him.

"CHARLIE MANUEL IS AN OFFENSIVE MANAGER, BUT THE OFFENSE HAS FALLEN APART OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS." —KARL RAVECH

4 NEW YORK METS

IKE DAVIS

50 — 62 LOW — 72 HIGH — 100

72 WINS IF ... Johan Santana regains form after a winter resting his arm, rookie Travis D'Arnaud draws comparisons with Buster Posey, and David Wright celebrates his new contract with an even better year than 2007 (.325/.416/.546).

62 WINS IF ... The outfield, ranked 29th in WAR last year, doesn't produce, and the unchanged bullpen, 29th in MLB with a 4.63 ERA, falls flat yet again.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Ike Davis **1.37**
Mets **0.87**

0 — 1 — 2

METS

Mets fans should be wishing their team were less predictable. Because while Ike Davis and Santana both have intriguing upside, from top to bottom the team is probably too weak to contend or surprise with a run toward the playoffs.

IKE DAVIS

Davis stumbled badly out of the gate in 2012, and a lingering ankle injury led to a dramatic drop in his fielding metrics. But things clicked for him in the second half—he hit 27 of his career-high 32 homers after June 11—so perhaps there's hope for him yet.

"THERE'S A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL, AND THEY'LL BE BETTER THAN LAST YEAR, BUT NOT ENOUGH FOR THE POSTSEASON YET." —SCHILLING

5 MIAMI MARLINS

GIANCARLO STANTON

50 — 60 LOW — 74 HIGH — 100

74 WINS IF ... Giancarlo Stanton smashes a personal-best 55 homers, shortstop Adeiny Hechavarria keeps up the spectacular plays, Logan Morrison tweets hilariously and an under-pressure Jeffrey Loria sells.

60 WINS IF ... The roster purge has created a team that no one wants to watch and Stanton asks out and is traded in late July, but despite the pressure, Loria refuses to sell.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Marlins **1.69**
Giancarlo Stanton **1.12**

0 — 1 — 2

MARLINS

The (once-again) chop-shopped Marlins have more question marks than the Riddler's outfit. While they have enough young talent to start to build the next good Miami tear-down squad, 2013 will be stuck between mediocrity and disaster.

GIANCARLO STANTON

The Fish can count on very little beyond Stanton, MLB's SLG leader with the bases empty (.704) last season. Better hope he keeps that up, because with this gutted lineup, he's likely to have even fewer chances to knock guys in.

"IT WAS AN EMBARRASSING WINTER. NOW IT'S GOING TO BE VERY HARD TO GET YOUNG PLAYERS TO IMPROVE IN THAT ENVIRONMENT." —SCHILLING

photograph by JOHN LOOMIS (Soriano)

THIS PAGE FROM LEFT: TOM DIPACE; MARK J. REBILAS/USA TODAY SPORTS; TOM DIPACE; WILFREDO LEE/AP IMAGES

1 ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

PROJECTED WINS

50 — 83 LOW — 90 HIGH — 100

90 WINS IF ... Young gun Trevor Rosenthal (average fastball: 97.4 mph) throws more heat out of the bullpen than he would've as the fifth starter and closer Jason Motte (10.8 K's/9 IP) keeps the whiffs coming. Shortstop Pete Kozma (.383 OBP in 26 games) makes fans forget Rafael Furcal, while Allen Craig, Carlos Beltran, Matt Holliday, Yadier Molina and David Freese help the team match last season's .759 OPS.

83 WINS IF ... Chris Carpenter never returns from circulation problems, prospect Joe Kelly isn't ready, and Beltran or Holliday gets hurt again. With a short bench, the Cards, who scored once in the final three games of the NLCS, really miss new Ranger Lance Berkman.

"BELTRAN WAS OUTSTANDING EARLY LAST YEAR. HE THEN TAILED OFF, BUT HIS TAILING OFF IS STILL REALLY GOOD."
—KARL RAVECH

CARLOS BELTRAN

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Gauges the volatility of each team and its pivotal player from 0 (what you see is what you get) to 2 (who knows).

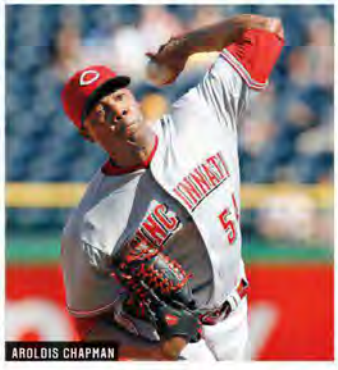
CARDINALS

With a roster of established vets, the Redbirds are the least unpredictable team in baseball. Even if Carpenter's distinguished career is over and Jaime Garcia (7-7 last year) doesn't replace Kyle Lohse as a solid No. 2, the team still has enough depth that it won't have a spot for a league-average starter for a year or two.

CARLOS BELTRAN

Injuries are always an issue with RF Beltran, who turns 36 in April. But he played 151 games last season (his most since 2008) and was just three RBIs shy of his ninth 100-RBI year. After his .206 BA in July/August raised red flags, he rebounded with a huge postseason: .357 BA and three homers.

2 WILD CARD CINCINNATI REDS


AROLDIS CHAPMAN

97 WINS IF ... Joey Votto keeps up his MLB-best .338 road BA ('10-12), new starter Aroldis Chapman's fastball is close to as good as it was out of the pen (98 mph average) and Jonathan Broxton tops his career-high 36 saves.

86 WINS IF ... The Reds lack leadership without Scott Rolen. Chapman can't throw strikes for more than an inning and Broxton's dwindling strikeout rate (career-low 7.0 per 9 IP) hurts in the ninth.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

REDS

The rotation could be scary with Chapman at No. 5. Offensively, Ryan Ludwick and Todd Frazier aren't locks to repeat their combined 45 HRs and 147 RBIs. And although Shin-Soo Choo brings a career .381 OBP, he has played just five games in CF since 2006.

AROLDIS CHAPMAN

Last season Chapman threw 88% fastballs (fourth most in MLB). As a starter, he'll need to develop his off-speed stuff. Not to worry: Four of the Reds' 2012 starters logged 200+plus innings, which means Chapman can ease into the role.

"THEIR ACHILLES' HEEL WAS AN INABILITY TO GET ON BASE AT THE TOP OF THE ORDER. THEY'VE ADDRESSED THAT WITH CHOO." —AARON BOONE

3 PITTSBURGH PIRATES

STARLING MARTE

82 WINS IF ... Andrew McCutchen gets off to another great start (.362 first-half BA), 2B Neil Walker keeps up his .770 OPS of the past three years and C Russell Martin, who has gunned down an MLB-high 216 runners since '06, sparks the D.

72 WINS IF ... Jason Grilli (five saves in 10 years) can't replace closer Joel Hanrahan, new arm Francisco Liriano has more injury trouble and the bats sputter around McCutchen.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

PIRATES

Pedro Alvarez and Starling Marte are tricky to predict, but vets Wandy Rodriguez, Clint Barmes and Garrett Jones are all too familiar. For two decades, the Pirates have been nothing but predictable. Time for something new: Their farm system is stacked.

STARLING MARTE

After batting .303 in six seasons in the minors, the prized prospect hit .257 as a midseason call-up last year and is slated to take over in leftfield. But the 24-year-old won't keep the job if he whiffs every 3.3 at-bats, as he did in his big league debut.

"I LOVE SOME OF THEIR YOUNG ARMS, BUT THEY NEED AN ACE, A REAL ACE THEY CAN COUNT ON. A.J. BURNETT IS A COIN FLIP." —CURT SCHILLING

4 MILWAUKEE BREWERS

MIKE FIERS

84 WINS IF ... Ryan Braun again shrugs off PED whispers and goes 50/130. Rickie Weeks hits all year (not just in the second half) and speedy shortstop Jean Segura, acquired for Zack Greinke, takes a step toward stardom.

74 WINS IF ... The rotation is barren after ace Yovani Gallardo, while NL pitchers figure out phenom Norichika Aoki (.288 BA, 30 SBs) and again pitch around Braun (15 IBB).

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

BREWERS

The Brewers have a dependable core in Braun, Gallardo, Aramis Ramirez and Corey Hart. We know what they'll do. Unfortunately, we also have a pretty good idea of what the rest of the roster will do, which means Milwaukee won't rise much above .500.

MIKE FIERS

After a late-May call-up, the 27-year-old converted closer recorded a 1.77 ERA in his first 11 outings and was touted as a ROY candidate. Then he faded badly (7.09 ERA in September) and finished the year 9-10. And that earned him the No. 2 rotation job.

"GALLARDO IS A LEGIT ACE, BUT AFTER HIM IT'S A BUNCH OF QUESTION MARKS, AND IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE ALL OF THEM DELIVERING." —BOONE

5 CHICAGO CUBS

ANTHONY RIZZO

80 WINS IF ... Anthony Rizzo continues where he left off (.805 OPS in 87 games), Jeff Samardzija shows the stuff of a true ace and wins 15 games, and SS Starlin Castro (529 hits before age 23) finally puts it all together.

72 WINS IF ... RHPs Matt Garza and Scott Baker enter June on the DL and vets Carlos Marmol and Alfonso Soriano are traded for kids, letting the Cubs continue the big rebuild.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

CUBS

Chicago figures to be more competitive this year, especially if shortstop Castro pays attention on every play. But with a bunch of No. 4 starters in the rotation, the North Siders' win total is likely to remain in the 70s. There's always next year, right, Cubs fans?

ANTHONY RIZZO

One of the centerpieces of Theo Epstein's makeover, Rizzo has 30-HR, 100-RBI potential. New challenge: In his first full year, the 23-year-old will face plenty of lefty relievers after going .208/.243/.356 in 101 at-bats against southpaws.

"BEING PATIENT ISN'T FUN, BUT THEY'RE CLOSER THAN PEOPLE THINK. I SEE THEM IN THE POSTSEASON SOONER THAN LATER." —SCHILLING

photograph by STEVE BOYLE (Beltran)

THIS PAGE FROM LEFT: CHARLES LECLAIRE/USA TODAY SPORTS; JUSTIN K. ALLER/GETTY IMAGES; BRIAN KERSEY/GETTY IMAGES; NAM Y. HUH/AP IMAGES

1

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

PROJECTED WINS

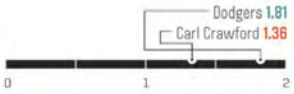
50 — 83 LOW — 98 HIGH

98 WINS IF ... All the pieces fit like magic: Adrian Gonzalez drives in a career-high 130 runs in his first full LA season, Matt Kemp's hamstring is forgotten as he again vies for MVP, Clayton Kershaw and Zack Greinke combine for 42 wins, and Kenley Jansen and Brandon League deal without falloff for a stacked bullpen that held opponents to a .221 batting average (fourth in MLB) last season.

83 WINS IF ... The pieces fracture and the clubhouse melts under high expectations as Hanley Ramirez—who hasn't had a plus UZR/150 at short since 2008—sorely misses playing third base, Kemp gets hurt again, and Josh Beckett comes nowhere near matching his full-season bests of a 1.03 WHIP and 2.89 ERA, set in 2011.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Gauges the volatility of each team and its pivotal player from 0 (what you see is what you get) to 2 (who knows).



DODGERS

While the rotation has depth, the question-filled lineup is a muscle pull away from too much Skip Schumaker and Juan Uribe. Odds of a thrilling ride are matched by a nightmarish scenario in which the rebuilt rotation finds itself, yet again, as a great engine on a car missing a wheel.

CARL CRAWFORD

The Dodgers made a $100 million gamble on Crawford, whose two injury-plagued seasons in Boston produced far less than his nine in Tampa Bay. His OBP with the Sox was .292, a full 45 points less than with the Rays. LA needs the Ray of hope back.

"YOU DON'T SPEND $215 MILLION TO COMPETE—YOU DO IT TO WIN. IT'S WORLD SERIES OR BUST THIS YEAR."
—CURT SCHILLING

CARL CRAWFORD

photograph by JOHN HUET

it's not just a new season. it's a whole new ball game.

T-Mobile® is breaking away from the rest of the wireless world and completely changing the game. We're taking the pain out of wireless, which makes you the winner.

T-Mobile®
OFFICIAL SPONSOR

T-Mobile and the magenta color are registered trademarks of Deutsche Telekom AG. © 2013 T-Mobile USA, Inc.
Major League Baseball trademarks and copyrights are used with the permission of Major League Baseball Properties, Inc. Visit MLB.com

2 SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

ANGEL PAGAN

81 LOW 93 HIGH (50–100)

93 WINS IF ... Matt Cain and Madison Bumgarner each win 20 games, Tim Lincecum's control (4.4 BB/9 IP in 2012) improves for the first time in four years and Buster Posey's crouch begins to look Bench-esque.

81 WINS IF ... Marco Scutaro is still 17th defensively among second basemen, the return of Andres Torres (.226 BA and .320 OBP the past two seasons) doesn't improve the outfield, and the fall of Lincecum continues.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Giants **1.45**
Angel Pagan **1.45**

0 — 1 — 2

GIANTS

Despite two rings in three years, the team oozes mystery due to the uncertain production of Scutaro, Hunter Pence and Angel Pagan. And the rotation stands one stint of elbow soreness away from relying on Yusmeiro Petit or a rushed-up Chris Heston.

ANGEL PAGAN

Was a four-year, $40 million deal too much for a centerfielder? Maybe down the road, but Pagan is just 31, and his .288/.338/.440 slash line in 2012 resembled his 2009 and 2010 numbers much more than his subpar 2011 with the Mets.

"WITH THE GIANTS, IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT THE PITCHING, AND A LOT OF THAT HAS TO DO WITH THE GUY BEHIND HOME PLATE." —RICK SUTCLIFFE

3 ARIZONA D-BACKS

ADAM EATON

83 LOW 91 HIGH (50–100)

91 WINS IF ... The Diamondbacks' all-under-30 rotation takes another jump forward and the pen continues to strand inherited runners (only 28% scored in 2012).

83 WINS IF ... Having lost out in the Upton trade, the D-backs want for power bats and an everyday shortstop, and visions of giving up on arms like Trevor Bauer (see: Cleveland) and Jarrod Parker (see: Oakland) haunt their sleep.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Adam Eaton **1.42**
Diamondbacks **0.45**

0 — 1 — 2

DIAMONDBACKS

There isn't a lot of unknown upside or downside in Arizona this year. From Cody Ross to Martin Prado, the lineup is full of established players, and the pitching rotation, which added Brandon McCarthy, has great depth after the top five.

ADAM EATON

One reason the D-backs were willing to trade Justin Upton? Eaton, who hit .375 in the minors and posted a .412 SLG in 22 games as a 2012 September call-up. Zona is prepared to roll the dice with the 24-year-old, who is capable of 30 or more steals.

"THIS ORGANIZATION BELIEVES IT HAS ITS CENTERFIELDER AND LEADOFF HITTER OF THE FUTURE IN ADAM EATON." —AARON BOONE

4 SAN DIEGO PADRES

YONDER ALONSO

71 LOW 79 HIGH (50–100)

79 WINS IF ... 2012 NL RBI champ Chase Headley continues his steady ascent in his sixth season and solid arms at the top of the rotation segue to steady K's by the bullpen (524 in 2012, fourth in MLB).

71 WINS IF ... Phenom C Yasmani Grandal's 50-game PED suspension stalls the O, fastballs stay scarce for Headley (29.2% last year) and erratic "ace" Edinson Volquez (2012 NL walk leader) suffers from WHIP-lash.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Yonder Alonso **1.29**
Padres **0.26**

0 — 1 — 2

PADRES

The Padres remain short on superstardom, but they can claim reasonable Plan B's at every position. The question marks come from starters like Jason Marquis and Clayton Richard—and the inexperienced arms that follow them.

YONDER ALONSO

Last year was the first baseman's first as an everyday player, and not only did he not wear down, he also got better after the break (.285 BA versus .263 before). With six of 2012's nine homers on the road, he could benefit from the moving in of the fences at Petco.

"WHEN YOU BUILD AN ODD BALLPARK, YOU BUILD A TEAM TO PLAY IN IT. BUT THEN YOU STILL HAVE TO PLAY 81 GAMES ON THE ROAD." —SCHILLING

5 COLORADO ROCKIES

JHOULYS CHACIN

66 LOW 76 HIGH (50–100)

76 WINS IF ... Troy Tulowitzki finally lives up to his $157 million, Carlos Gonzalez has another 20/20 season and smart new manager Walt Weiss gives the Rox future hope.

66 WINS IF ... MLB's worst 2012 rotation (5.81 ERA) is somehow just as bad, the team has no answers at second or third, and Todd Helton, who hasn't hit 20 homers since 2005, finishes his glorious career with a not-so-glorious final lap.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Jhoulys Chacin **1.46**
Rockies **0.85**

0 — 1 — 2

ROCKIES

The Rockies have a little potential upside thanks to the reunion of a rotation that essentially lost everyone to injury at some point last season. But not too much: It's hard to believe the O that led the NL in batting will get much better any time soon.

JHOULYS CHACIN

Chacin managed just three wins in 14 starts before landing on the DL with a nerve injury. Then he inked a two-year, $6.5 million deal in January. Why did Colorado stick by him? The guy owns a 4.18 ERA at Coors Field, good for a spot in the team's all-time top 10.

"THEY HAVE TO LEAVE SPRING TRAINING WITH 16 TO 18 PITCHERS BECAUSE COORS IS SUCH A TAXING ENVIRONMENT TO PITCH IN." —SCHILLING

FROM LEFT: PATRIC SCHNEIDER/AP IMAGES; DENIS PORDY/GETTY IMAGES; JUAN DELEON/ICON SMI; CHRIS HUMPHREYS/USA TODAY SPORTS

©2013 P&G
WOLFTHORN
A NEW SCENT FROM
Old Spice
ANSWER THE SMELL OF THE WILD

1

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

PROJECTED WINS

50 — 89 LOW — 98 HIGH

98 WINS IF ... Jose Reyes thrives in a triple-happy park and logs a career-best 130 runs, Bautista returns from wrist surgery to hit 50 homers and win the MVP, new ace R.A. Dickey again wins 20 and fellow newcomer Mark Buehrle produces a double-digit win total for the 13th straight season.

89 WINS IF ... Despite all the moves, the vaunted rotation doesn't quite pan out, Josh Johnson or Brandon Morrow gets hurt again, the turf is unkind to Reyes' knees, and 2012 NL Cy Young winner Dickey grows weary of all those AL East sluggers.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Gauges the volatility of each team and its pivotal player from 0 (what you see is what you get) to 2 (who knows).

BLUE JAYS

There is some drama around Jose Bautista's recovery from wrist surgery, but the mound is a drama-free zone. Toronto spent the offseason acquiring good, reliable pitchers. Now the rotation has a sagelike 41 years of experience.

BRETT LAWRIE

A healthy and consistent season from Lawrie could put the rebuilt Jays over the top. His defense is solid—last year he ranked sixth among third basemen in UZR/150—but he hit .240 with just two steals after the break.

"EVERY YEAR ONE TEAM MAKES THE STATEMENT: 'THIS IS OUR YEAR.' THIS WINTER THE BLUE JAYS MADE THIS THEIR YEAR."
—KARL RAVECH

BRETT LAWRIE

photograph by PATRIK GIARDINO

INTRODUCING

BECK'S SAPPHIRE

MADE SMOOTH WITH
GERMAN SAPPHIRE HOPS

Always Enjoy Responsibly.

©2013 Brauerei Beck & Co., Beck's® Sapphire Beer, St. Louis, MO

2 TAMPA BAY RAYS

EVAN LONGORIA

83 LOW — 94 HIGH (50–100)

94 WINS IF ... New star Wil Myers hits 30 homers and wins ROY, Matt Moore pitches up to his 14.46 K/9 IP September call-up in 2011, Evan Longoria stays healthy and Fernando Rodney again leads all relievers (0.60 ERA in 2012).

83 WINS IF ... They still don't have a catcher (26th in MLB in slugging at the position in 2012), James Loney's numbers keep falling and Myers isn't ready for the middle of the order.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Evan Longoria 1.29
Rays 1.19
(0 – 1 – 2)

RAYS

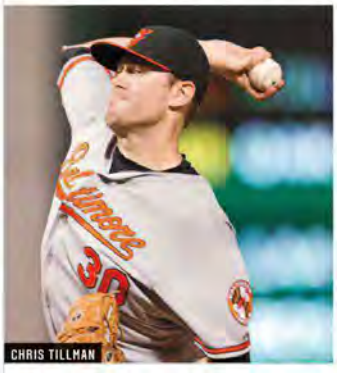
The Joe Maddon formula requires a constant pipeline of confident young pitchers and conjuring terrific relievers out of thin air. It has worked so far, but the playoffs are never a lock in the AL East. See: 2012's 90-wins-but-no-October-baseball season.

EVAN LONGORIA

As he goes, so go the Rays. Tampa was 47-27 with him and 43-45 without him last season. While in action, Longoria had a career-best .896 OPS, and his 28.5 WAR over the past five years is the best of any 3B in the league. The question is: Can he stay healthy?

"WITH DAVID PRICE AT THE TOP AND MATT MOORE DEVELOPING, THIS COULD BE THE BEST ROTATION IN THE DIVISION." —RAVECH

3 BALTIMORE ORIOLES


CHRIS TILLMAN

76 LOW — 90 HIGH (50–100)

90 WINS IF ... Miracle worker Buck Showalter finds more magic, 20-year-old Manny Machado continues his heroics at the plate, Dylan Bundy, also 20, wins a job in the rotation and Chris Davis (33 HRs, 85 RBIs last season) hits 40.

76 WINS IF ... The untouched rotation remains 21st in ERA and the O's fail to duplicate last season's lucky streak of 29-9 in one-run games and 16 straight extra-inning wins.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Orioles 1.66
Chris Tillman 1.46
(0 – 1 – 2)

ORIOLES

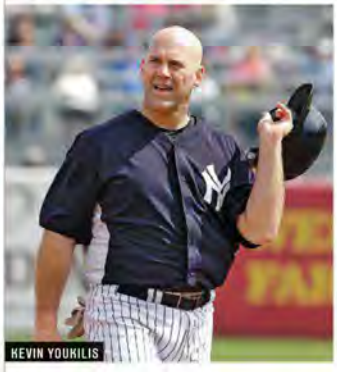
Beyond luck, the O's had solid performances on the mound and at the dish. Jason Hammel's ERA dropped from 4.76 to 3.43 in his first season with the club, and the team's 214 home runs were second in MLB. Both trends must continue if they are to contend.

CHRIS TILLMAN

Much like his team did, this 24-year-old came out of nowhere in 2012, with a 2.93 ERA—more than two runs better than each of his three previous seasons. But he wasn't called up until July, so there is real risk that he won't hold up over a full season.

"DYLAN BUNDY IS THE BEST PITCHING PROSPECT IN BASEBALL. YOU JUST DON'T SEE KIDS THAT YOUNG THAT GOOD THAT FAST." —CURT SCHILLING

4 NEW YORK YANKEES


KEVIN YOUKILIS

77 LOW — 91 HIGH (50–100)

91 WINS IF ... Robinson Cano builds on his career-best .929 OPS, Derek Jeter plays 155 games on a repaired ankle, Mariano Rivera saves 40 in his swan song and Alex Rodriguez crams last season's power (18 HRs, 57 RBIs) into his injury-shortened season.

77 WINS IF ... Jeter limps, Rivera's cutter stutters (he *is* 43), Andy Pettitte makes only 15 starts and the big club gets stuck at catcher waiting for Single-A star Gary Sanchez.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Yankees 1.63
Kevin Youkilis 1.18
(0 – 1 – 2)

YANKEES

New York is as vulnerable as in any year in recent memory. The self-imposed salary cap has hurt depth, and although the roster has 90-plus-win potential, when half your squad is old enough to remember the Reagan years, you'll get familiar with the DL.

KEVIN YOUKILIS

The Yankees' archenemy-turned-third baseman saw his offensive numbers decline the past two seasons. And although he hit .303 last year in favorable parks, Yankee Stadium, 17th toughest in ESPN Park Factors, will be far less welcoming.

"THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GET CREATIVE AND SCORE WITH THEIR LEGS—BECAUSE THEY CAN'T DEPEND ON A THREE-RUN HOMER." —JOHN KRUK

5 BOSTON RED SOX

JON LESTER

79 LOW — 93 HIGH (50–100)

93 WINS IF ... New manager John Farrell mends clubhouse relations, a revitalized Jon Lester and a revamped pen (Joel Hanrahan and Koji Uehara averaged 10-plus K/9 IP in 2012) form the pitching core and Will Middlebrooks' bat provides pop.

79 WINS IF ... The changes aren't enough, Mike Napoli's injury woes continue, Shane Victorino's .245 BA in LA doesn't improve and Ryan Dempster doesn't enjoy the AL East.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Red Sox 1.49
Jon Lester 1.38
(0 – 1 – 2)

RED SOX

Boston did a mini-rebuilding job in hopes of competing again in 2013, but pitching was the big problem. So if Lester and Clay Buchholz don't return to form at the top of the rotation, the winter additions will have been for naught.

JON LESTER

Lester's ERA rose to 4.82 last year as he surrendered a career-worst 25 homers. What's more, his strikeout rate has dropped for three straight years. But maybe the return of Farrell, his former pitching coach, will work wonders for the potential ace.

"LESTER IS KEY. HE HAS TO BE THE GUY WHO STOPS LOSING STREAKS AND STARTS WIN STREAKS. IF HE CAN, THIS TEAM HAS A CHANCE." —KRUK

FROM LEFT: LEON HALIP/GETTY IMAGES; ANDREW WOOLLEY/FOUR SEAM IMAGES/AP IMAGES; CHRIS O'MEARA/AP IMAGES; J. ROGASH/GETTY IMAGES

© 2013 Lorillard

Newport®

pleasure!®

Visit us at Newport-pleasure.com

Restricted to Adult Smokers 21 or Older.

These cigarettes do not present a reduced risk of harm compared to other cigarettes.

Scan to visit the World of Newport Pleasure!®

Newport, Pleasure, Newport Pleasure, The World of Newport Pleasure, Menthol Gold, Menthol Blue, spinnaker design, package design and other trade dress elements TM Lorillard Licensing Company LLC Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off.

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.

1

DETROIT TIGERS

PROJECTED WINS

50 — 84 LOW — 95 HIGH — 100

"WITH TWO MVPs AND A CY YOUNG, DETROIT BELIEVES IT IS EVEN BETTER THIS YEAR."

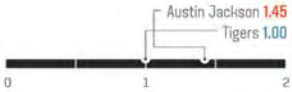
—KARL RAVECH

95 WINS IF ... Miguel Cabrera becomes the first back-to-back Triple Crown winner, Justin Verlander carries his 0.78 postseason WHIP into 2013, Victor Martinez logs his fifth 100-plus-RBI season, Torii Hunter steps up baseball's second-worst defense and the Tigers find their missing piece: a shutdown closer.

84 WINS IF ... After last season, pressure to win the World Series grows so overwhelming that the Tigers play not to lose. Not good when you're old and slow, lack defense (29th in UZR/150 in 2012) and hit into more double plays (156) than any other team.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Gauges the volatility of each team and its pivotal player from 0 (what you see is what you get) to 2 (who knows).



TIGERS

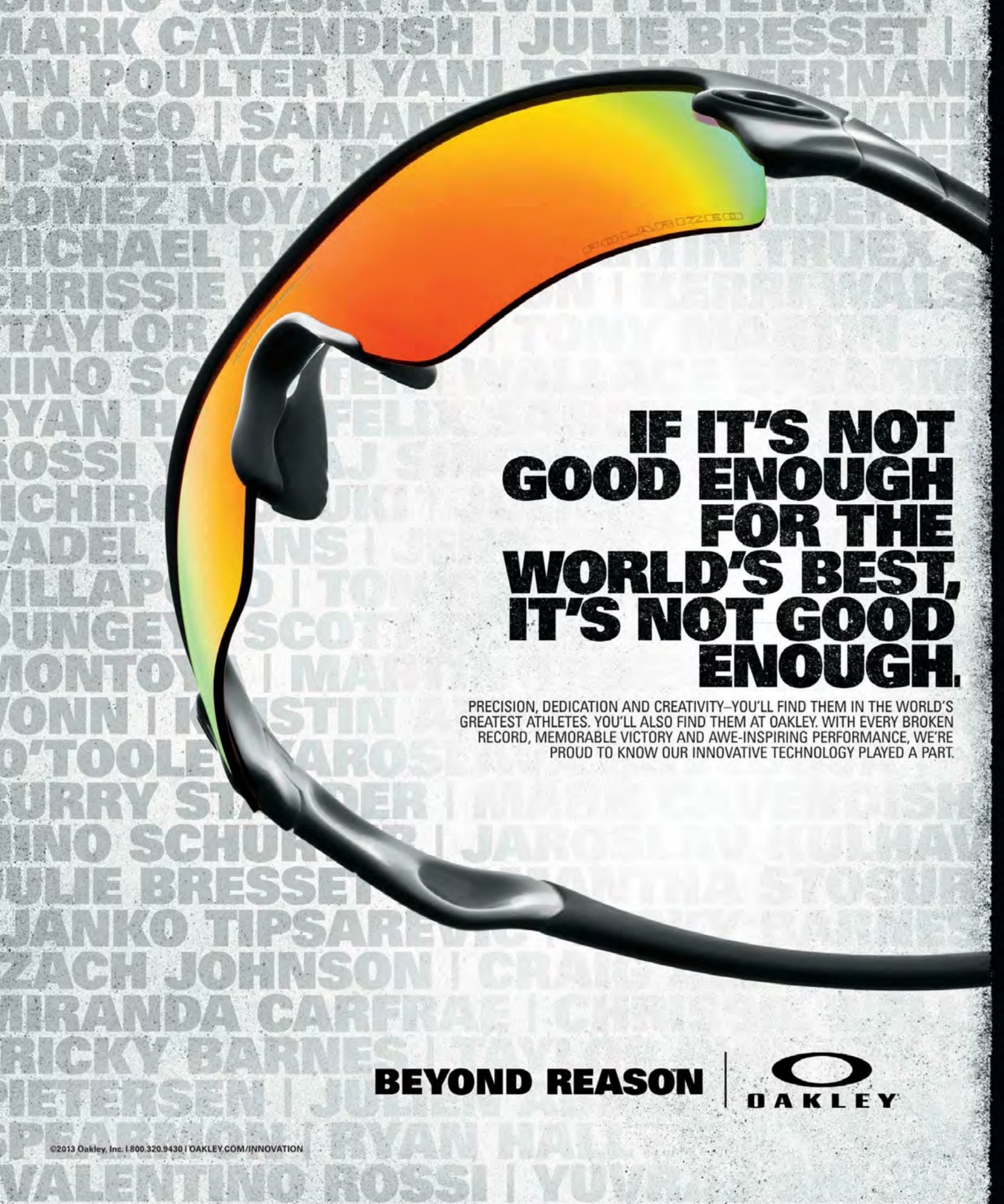
Surprisingly, the questions are on offense (11th in runs in 2012). How far from the cliff is the 37-year-old Hunter? Will Andy Dirks (.857 OPS) repeat? Can Martinez hit after a year off for ACL rehab?

AUSTIN JACKSON

At age 25, Jackson had a breakout season (.300 BA, .479 SLG with 47 fewer strikeouts than in 2011). Now the biggest hole in his still-maturing game is his baserunning (12 steals in 21 attempts last year).

AUSTIN JACKSON

photograph by JOHN LOOMIS


IF IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE WORLD'S BEST, IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH.
PRECISION, DEDICATION AND CREATIVITY–YOU'LL FIND THEM IN THE WORLD'S GREATEST ATHLETES. YOU'LL ALSO FIND THEM AT OAKLEY. WITH EVERY BROKEN RECORD, MEMORABLE VICTORY AND AWE-INSPIRING PERFORMANCE, WE'RE PROUD TO KNOW OUR INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY PLAYED A PART.
BEYOND REASON
OAKLEY
©2013 Oakley, Inc. I 800.320.9430 I OAKLEY.COM/INNOVATION

2 CLEVELAND INDIANS

JUSTIN MASTERSON

50 — 74 LOW — 85 HIGH — 100

85 WINS IF ... Terry Francona, Nick Swisher and CF Michael Bourn bring energy and electricity, RF Drew Stubbs adds 30 home runs to last season's 30 steals and Mark Reynolds rebounds from a 23-HR down year.

74 WINS IF ... The Indians again post the highest ERA in the AL (4.78), Ubaldo Jimenez's velocity drops for the fourth consecutive year and Stubbs and Reynolds collectively record 400 strikeouts.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Justin Masterson **1.41**
Indians **1.10**

0 — 1 — 2

INDIANS

Bookended by Bourn and LF Michael Brantley, the Cleveland lineup is solid. But the rotation is not. If Jimenez and Masterson deliver, the team could compete for a wild card and make the Tigers sweat. If not, expect high-scoring games.

JUSTIN MASTERSON

After Masterson turned a corner in 2011, his ERA veered from 3.21 (12th in AL) to a career-worst 4.93 last season. The sinkerballer struggled with control (3.8 BB/9 IP); he overthrew as games wore on, leaving the ball up in the zone.

"WITH THREE CENTERFIELDERS IN THE OUTFIELD, THEY'RE GOING TO CATCH THE BALL. IF YOU CATCH AND SCORE, YOU'LL BE IN GAMES." —RAVECH

3 CHICAGO WHITE SOX

ADAM DUNN

50 — 73 LOW — 83 HIGH — 100

83 WINS IF ... Chris Sale wins the Cy Young in year two as a starter, Addison Reed (29 saves as a rookie) emerges as one of the AL's best closers, Adam Dunn hits another 40 HRs and Paul Konerko clubs No. 450.

73 WINS IF ... Last year's 14–22 slide to end the season continues, Tyler Flowers wilts in comparison to A.J. Pierzynski behind the plate and an aging heart of the order wears down well before September.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Adam Dunn **1.47**
White Sox **0.89**

0 — 1 — 2

WHITE SOX

Besides Dunn and Alex Rios, what you see is what you get with the Sox offense. It's caught in the middle, without enough upside to scare the Tigers or enough downside to warrant blowing up the roster to start the next South Side rebuild.

ADAM DUNN

The ultimate feast-or-famine hitter bounced back from a monumentally bad 2011 (11 HRs, 42 RBIs) to hit 41 homers and log 96 RBIs. But Dunn also had an AL-record 222 strikeouts and only 16 second-half dingers, leaving room to wonder.

"YES, ADDISON REED TOOK HIS LUMPS, BUT HE GREW INTO THE ROLE, AND HE HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO GO OUT AND GET THE JOB DONE." —AARON BOONE

4 KANSAS CITY ROYALS

ERIC HOSMER

50 — 74 LOW — 82 HIGH — 100

82 WINS IF ... James Shields, Wade Davis, Ervin Santana and Jeremy Guthrie finally give KC a rotation, which takes pressure off the bullpen, Alex Gordon again leads MLB in doubles (51), and Eric Hosmer delivers on his first .300 season.

74 WINS IF ... Shields is the only real rotation upgrade, production from the outfield (third-fewest HRs) is still missing and Hosmer resembles 2012 (.663 OPS), not 2011 (.799).

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Eric Hosmer **1.29**
Royals **0.50**

0 — 1 — 2

ROYALS

Kansas City seems to have the offense of an 85-win team and the starting rotation of a 70-win team. So even with the addition of Shields and his six years of 200-plus innings, the starting corps remains pretty predictable—and not in a good way.

ERIC HOSMER

Sky-high expectations for the 23-year-old first baseman were tempered by a .232/.304/.359 sophomore slump (a slight rotator cuff injury to end the season didn't help). But Hosmer's walk rate improved to 9.4%, so he hasn't lost his patience at the plate.

"THE BIGGEST QUESTION IS: WHO IS ALEX GORDON? IF HE TURNS A CORNER, HE COULD END UP HAVING A MONSTER YEAR." —CURT SCHILLING

5 MINNESOTA TWINS

JUSTIN MORNEAU

50 — 62 LOW — 70 HIGH — 100

70 WINS IF ... Joe Mauer matches 2009's 1.031 OPS and wins his fourth batting title, Justin Morneau plays concussion-free and hits 35 homers, and the Twins find hope in new ace Scott Diamond, who had an AL-best 1.61 BB/9 IP in his first full season.

62 WINS IF ... Vance Worley struggles as a front-of-rotation arm, the rest of the unproven staff bloats last season's puffy 4.77 ERA, Mauer gets hurt and Morneau gets dizzy.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Justin Morneau **1.39**
Twins **0.32**

0 — 1 — 2

TWINS

Minnesota still has Mauer, and Morneau could return to the player he was. But the rotation will probably be a disaster because even though the rebuilding Twins have a terrific stable of prospects, few are likely to make an impact this year.

JUSTIN MORNEAU

The first baseman was healthy for the first time in three years, but his 2012 numbers (.267/.333/.440) were far below '06-09, when he averaged 30 HRs and 118 RBIs. Adding to the uncertainty: His $80 million contract is up after this season.

"WITH THIS STAFF, NOTHING JUMPS OUT AT YOU. THEY DON'T HAVE 'THAT GUY.' THEY HAVE A BUNCH OF GUYS WHO YOU FLIP A COIN ON." —SCHILLING

FROM LEFT: TONY DEJAK/AP IMAGES; JOY R. ABSALON/USA TODAY SPORTS; PAUL SANCYA/AP IMAGES; JIM MONE/AP IMAGES

BAD COMBO

GOOD

PIZZERIA & PRETZEL

®/TM trademarks ©Mars, Incorporated 2012

1 LOS ANGELES ANGELS

PROJECTED WINS

50 — 86 LOW — 97 HIGH

97 WINS IF ... Mike Trout vaults from 30/49 to 50/50, a baseball first, and is a slam dunk for AL MVP. Josh Hamilton plays 150 games and goes yard in 40, while Albert Pujols returns to Cardinals form. Perennial top-five finisher Jered Weaver makes the final leap to Cy Young winner, and C.J. Wilson cuts down on last season's 19 HRs allowed.

86 WINS IF ... Hamilton struggles with either injury or strikeouts, Ryan Madson's elbow can't handle the workload and Tommy Hanson's fastball loses velocity for the third consecutive year.

"YOU COULD ARGUE THREE OF BASEBALL'S BEST PLAYERS ARE ON THIS TEAM. NOT JUST HITTERS—PLAYERS."

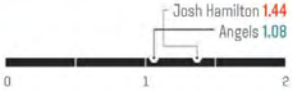
—KARL RAVECH

JOSH HAMILTON

photograph by JOHN HUET

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Gauges the volatility of each team and its pivotal player from 0 (what you see is what you get) to 2 (who knows).

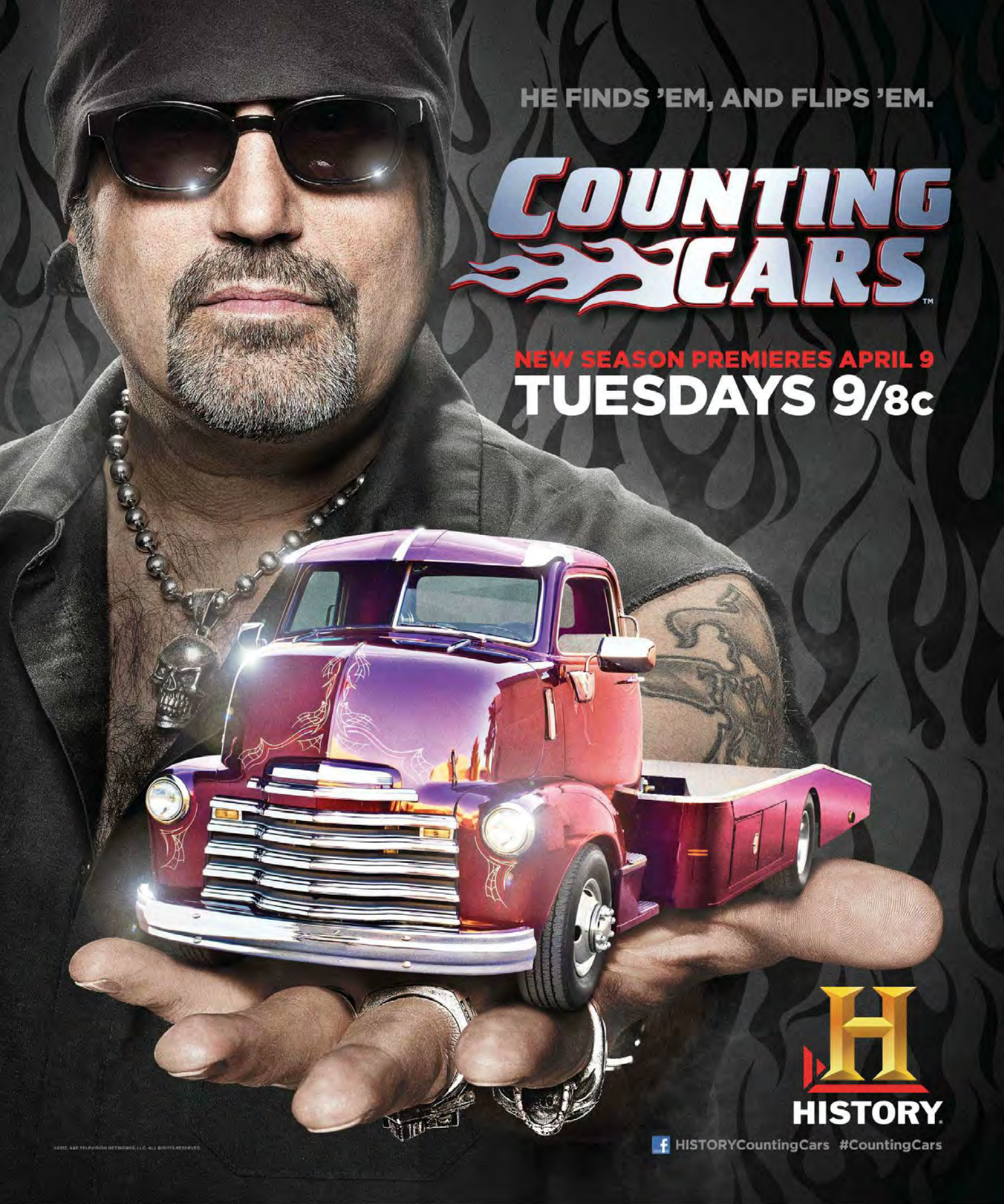


ANGELS

The Angels patched together rotation spots three through five on the fly this offseason, and Hanson is the biggest wild card. But if he pitches like he did as a rookie (2.89 ERA in 2009), the offense is solid enough to give the Angels a shot at the AL's best record.

JOSH HAMILTON

The winter's biggest free agent hit a career-high 43 homers in 2012, but he also had an Adam Dunn-like 35% strikeout rate in September and October. Equally worrisome? Hamilton moves from Rangers Ballpark (fourth in runs in ESPN's Park Factors) to Angel Stadium (27th).


HE FINDS 'EM, AND FLIPS 'EM.
COUNTING CARS™
NEW SEASON PREMIERES APRIL 9
TUESDAYS 9/8c
HISTORY
HISTORYCountingCars #CountingCars

2 WILD CARD OAKLAND ATHLETICS

JARROD PARKER

89 WINS IF ... The rotation, with an MLB-record 54 rookie wins last season, takes another step forward. Hiroyuki Nakajima's .302 career BA in Japan bolsters the lineup and LF Yoenis Cespedes builds on his 142-hit rookie season.

72 WINS IF ... The rotation has a sophomore slump, RF Josh Reddick continues his .164 fall batting and Nakajima's defense at shortstop is well below replacement level.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

ATHLETICS

From Cespedes to Reddick to Brett Anderson, the Athletics roster is full of players who have short résumés (12 rookies on the postseason roster). Also, Oakland is relying on key players, such as Coco Crisp and Jed Lowrie, with injury histories.

JARROD PARKER

The righthander led all AL rookies with a 3.47 ERA and was 4-1 with a 2.63 ERA in his final six starts of the regular season. But the A's went to him for 194 innings after he missed all of 2010 to Tommy John surgery. Minding pitch count will be key.

> THE JOB BOB MELVIN DID LAST YEAR WAS ONE OF THE BEST I'VE SEEN IN 15 OR 20 YEARS. I DON'T SEE HIS EFFECT WEARING OFF. —CURT SCHILLING

3 WILD CARD TEXAS RANGERS

IAN KINSLER

94 WINS IF ... MLB's first 1993 baby, Jurickson Profar, wins rookie of the year. A.J. Pierzynski brings a needed, nasty edge and Lance Berkman helps make up for Josh Hamilton's departure with his first 100-RBI season since 2008.

86 WINS IF ... They can't replace Hamilton's run production (128 RBIs last year), there's no fifth starter and Berkman gets hurt. Ron Washington doesn't last the season.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

RANGERS

Having players like Profar and Mike Olt in reserve is a nice way to limit your team's downside. But Texas' pitching is a little iffier, given the uncertain returns of Joakim Soria and Neftali Feliz (Tommy John), and Colby Lewis (flexor tendon).

IAN KINSLER

Without Hamilton, the Rangers need a big offensive season from the three-time All-Star. Better hope 2012—when Kinsler had a .326 OBP, was picked off an AL-high six times and tied a career high with 18 errors—was merely an aberration.

> THE LAST FEW YEARS, TEXAS WAS AS CLOSE TO A PERFECT TEAM AS WE HAD IN BASEBALL. THERE ARE A LOT OF QUESTIONS NOW. —RICK SUTCLIFFE

4 SEATTLE MARINERS

DUSTIN ACKLEY

80 WINS IF ... Kendrys Morales, Jason Bay and Michael Morse elevate the Mariners' MLB-worst bats (.234 BA, .369 SLG), Felix Hernandez maintains his low WHIP (1.14), and Justin Smoak repeats last season's 15 road HRs and adds 15 at home.

70 WINS IF ... Morales' broken leg still causes trouble, Morse struggles in a pitchers' park and Hernandez, in addition to needing run support, sees his velocity continue to drop.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

MARINERS

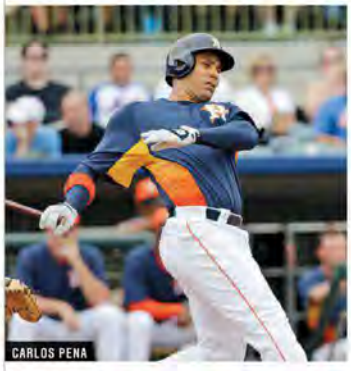
Jesus Montero is a work in progress, but the rest of the M's aren't prone to surprises. Seattle also has the world's largest collection of 1B/DH/corner OFs, yet its first basemen drove in 64 runs, the fewest in MLB.

DUSTIN ACKLEY

The second baseman hit .226 and saw his SLG plummet to .328 in his second season. But some blame for that falls on an ankle injury, and he will likely benefit from the more batter-friendly dimensions at a newly shrunken Safeco Field.

> EVERYBODY IS WAITING FOR ACKLEY TO BE THE GUY THEY DRAFTED, THE CORNERSTONE OF THAT INFIELD FOR A LONG TIME. —SCHILLING

5 HOUSTON ASTROS


CARLOS PENA

62 WINS IF ... Jose Altuve chases Freddie Patek's record for home runs by a 5'5" player (41). Carlos Pena brings an element of winning, and new manager Bo Porter provides enough positivity and many warm pats on the back.

54 WINS IF ... MLB's worst team doesn't have its front office's optimism, the rest of the powerful AL West plays to potential and this squad resembles the '62 Mets.

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

ASTROS

The Astros are still early in their monumental rebuild, so although they've acquired plenty of minor leaguers who will have significant upside in coming years, the only question in 2013 for the AL's newest team is whether it will finish fifth or ... very fifth.

CARLOS PENA

Houston's first regular DH hit .206 over the past three seasons, worst among qualifiers. But the analytically inclined Houston front office knows that he tied for fourth in walk rate last season and has averaged 32 homers a year since 2007.

> IT'S GOING TO BE A REALLY, REALLY, REALLY TOUGH YEAR. THEY COULD LOSE 120 GAMES, GIVEN THE DIVISION AND THE COMPETITION. —SCHILLING

FROM LEFT: JOHN SLEEZER/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT/GETTY IMAGES; ROB TRINGALI; LENNY IGNELZI/AP IMAGES; DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP IMAGES

YOUR #1 PICK FOR SAVINGS MVP.

GEICO

75 YEARS
OF HELPING PEOPLE
SAVE MONEY.

15 MINUTES COULD SAVE YOU 15 PERCENT OR MORE ON CAR INSURANCE.®

geico.com | 1-800-947-AUTO (2886) | local office

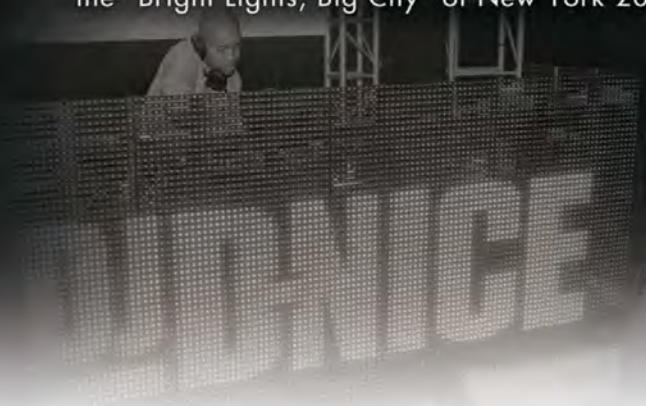
Some discounts, coverages, payment plans and features are not available in all states or all GEICO companies. Sponsored group discount amount varies in some states. One group discount applicable per policy. Coverage is individual. In New York a premium reduction may be available. Average savings amount based on national GEICO New Policyholder survey data through August 2012. GEICO is a registered service mark of Government Employees Insurance Company, Washington, D.C. 20076; a Berkshire Hathaway Inc. subsidiary. © 2013 GEICO

In its ninth consecutive year, *ESPN The Magazine* marched into New Orleans and touched down at Tad Gormley Stadium for an epic night that showcased what's NEXT in sports, technology and lifestyle.

ESPN The Magazine and its partners raised the bar—and the roof—once again, making NEXT the hottest ticket in the Big Easy. The biggest stars in sports and entertainment partied to the music of DJ D-Nice on the turntables and CeeLo Green featuring Goodie Mob, who reunited on the stage for an enthusiastic hour-long show.

Before she joined Beyoncé on the halftime stage on Sunday, Kelly Rowland spent the night keeping fans in the know when she took over @ESPNMag on Twitter to dish on the social scene, and celebrity guests followed suit. #NEXTNOLA became not only the talk of the town, but the talk of the Web at espnnext2013.com.

As the celebration came to a close and surprise confetti cannons showered all 100 tented yards of the Tad Gormley Stadium field, the cheering crowd was left wondering just how *ESPN The Magazine* will top #NEXTNOLA in 2014. To paraphrase our Grammy Award-winning performer, we can't wait for the "Bright Lights, Big City" of New York 2014!



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

Mercedes-Benz

Windows

Old Spice

Pringles

Norton by Symantec

photographs by JOHN HUET

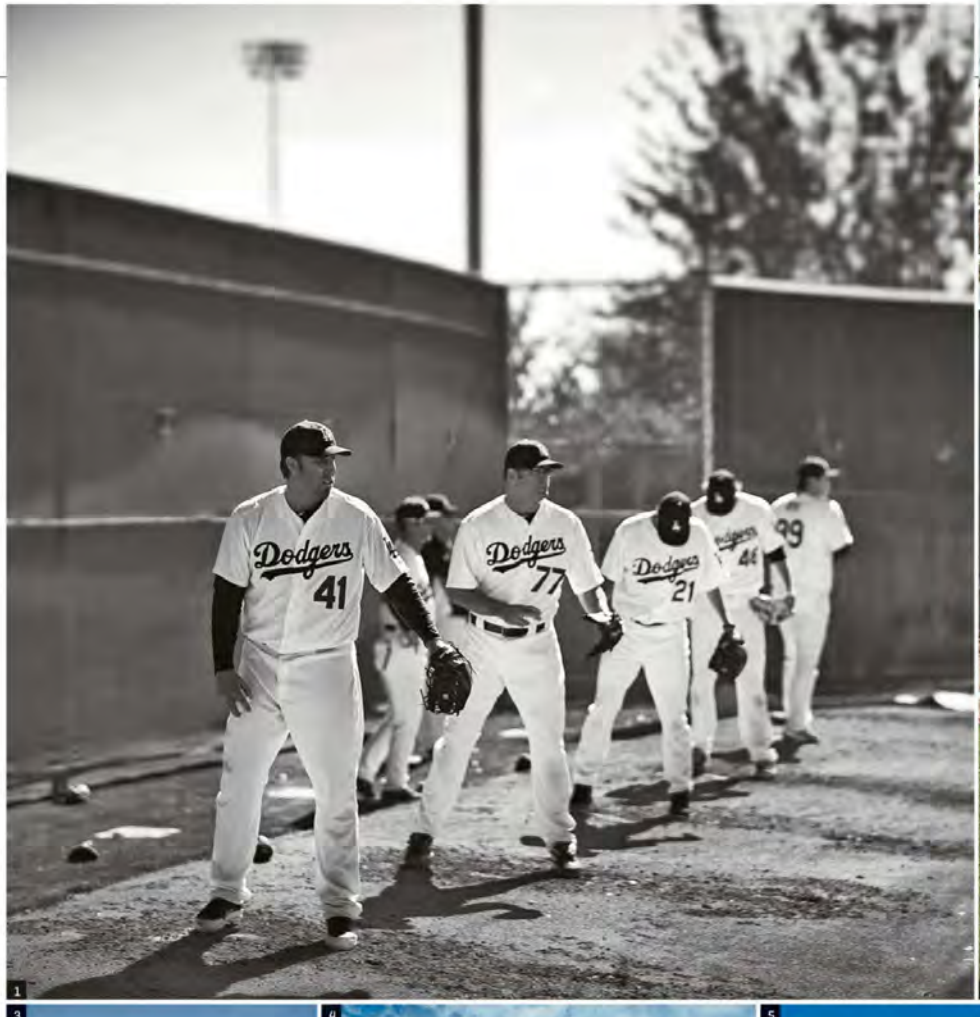
THE BEST BASEBALL $365 MILLION CAN BUY

BACK HOME IN Southern California, a mere 31 miles is all that separates the Angels and Dodgers. The two teams are squarely situated in the Los Angeles media market, which makes them direct competitors for fans and revenue. But by the looks of things in Arizona, there are plenty of both to go around. Despite freakishly cool climes (the North Valley recorded its first measurable snowfall in two decades), shivering, Sharpie-wielding diehards stake out two parking lots 27 miles apart at the crack of dawn, hoping to catch an up-close glimpse of the greatness afforded them by multi-billion-dollar local TV deals (the Angels already have theirs, the Dodgers are banking on one). Pujols, Weaver, Trout,

AS SPRING DAWNS IN THE ARIZONA DESERT, ALL OF L.A. IS DREAMING OF FORTUNE THIS FALL. **BY EDDIE MATZ**

Hamilton ... Kemp, Kershaw, Greinke ... everyone's an All-Star. As for the ballplayers, they're just as geeked as the fans, if not more. Though Tempe Diablo Stadium (freeway drone and muni golf course vibe) and Camelback Ranch (manicured country club vibe) are outwardly opposite, both inwardly flow with the same expectant energy and intimate vernacular: The smell of leather. The crunching of cleats. The familiar handshake of old teammates who know you better than you know your own family (and a lot of wealthy new ones who don't but soon will). And above all, the honest-to-god belief, founded on honest-to-god riches, that come late October, they'll still be lacing 'em up.

Mike Trout (opposite page, buzz cut) and Matt Kemp (above, front row, sunglasses) are at the center of SoCal baseball.



1

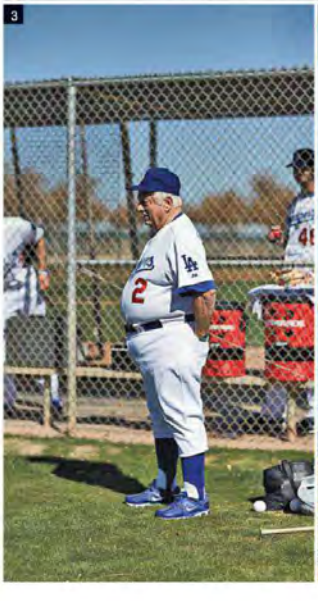
2

DODGERS

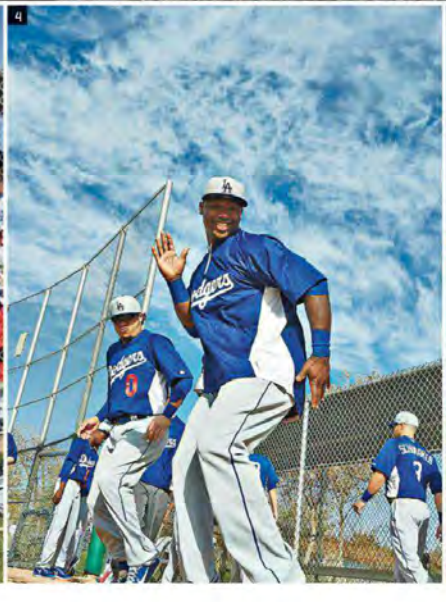
BLUE, BUT NOT

"We are in a far better spot than last year," says Dodgers GM Ned Colletti on Day 6 of full-squad workouts at Camelback, as he reclines in a golf cart just behind the third base line of practice field 1. "And it's not even close." As if trading for Hanley Ramirez (4), Josh Beckett (7, center), Carl Crawford, Adrian Gonzalez and Brandon League last summer weren't enough, this offseason the club plunked down $183M to land Zack Greinke (1, No. 21) and South Korean southpaw Hyun-Jin Ryu (5). They bolster a staff that's already fronted by the best young lefty in the game, 2011 Cy Young winner Clayton Kershaw. But perhaps the biggest spring sign that skipper Don Mattingly (2, with bat) and his squad are all-in—bigger than the prodigious 2013 projected payroll of $217M, or Tommy's tummy (3), or the smiles on new hitting coach Mark McGwire's boys (6)—is the presence of a certain wiry, white-haired 77-year-old who earned a grand total of $431,000 during his Hall of Fame career. Since Sandy Koufax last donned Dodger blue as a minor league instructor back in 1989, his relationship with the club for which he played all 12 of his big league seasons had been distant at best. Thanks to a

3



4



5

new ownership group that includes another LA legend (Magic Johnson), that's changing, although Koufax is quick to downplay his role: "All I can do is give suggestions." Like when he huddled with Beckett (7) and told the righty that putting too much weight on the toes of his back foot causes him to lean toward third, which forces him to throw back across his body and miss outside. If pearls like that are the icing, Koufax's mere presence is the cake. "Just the fact that he's here," says Kershaw, "shows you the kind of organization we're trying to become." (Hint: the kind that wins.)

ANGELS

SPRING REVIVAL

Entering the home clubhouse at Tempe Diablo, you're greeted by a document titled "Major League Baseball's Weapon-Free Workplace Policy" posted on a tan rectangular corkboard. Clearly the Angels are in violation. Three-time MVP Albert Pujols, the catch of last year's free agent crop, is scarfing down a bowl of oatmeal. A few lockers away, 2010 MVP Josh Hamilton chats with a reporter, while future MVP Mike Trout (6, right) shovels a pancake into his piehole. Resident DJ Jered Weaver cues up "Regulate," by Warren G and featuring Nate Dogg, as aspiring photog C.J. Wilson snaps away. One thing apparently missing amid all the artillery? Tension. Last April the Halos choked out of the gate because of an offense that scored just 80 runs in 23 games, got zero jacks from Pujols and played like it had a stick up its collective you-know-what (modeled by bench coach Rob Picciolo, 7). A leaky bullpen that blew 22 saves (tied for third most in MLB) didn't help, yet blame fell on Pujols (5). "In hindsight," says skipper Mike Scioscia (4, with bat), "Albert took too much on his shoulders." Based on the

1

3

4

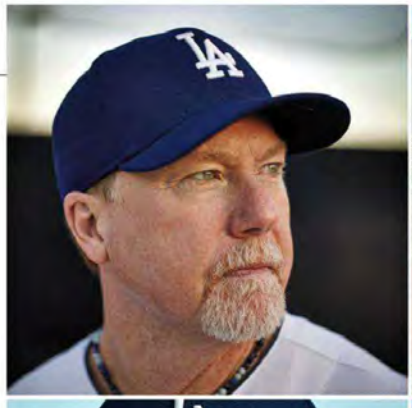
5

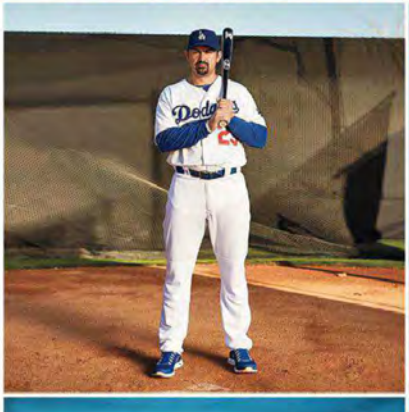
2

6

7

feel in Tempe (2), that won't happen again. "There's a looseness that wasn't evident last season," says GM Jerry Dipoto, the man who reeled in Hamilton and new arms Ryan Madson, Sean Burnett, Tommy Hanson and Jason Vargas. Even nonroster guys like 2B Luis Rodriguez (1) and Scottsdale boy Taylor Lindsey (3) find the groove. Helping set the tone is Hamilton, whom Dipoto calls "a real joker" and who on Day 2 of workouts launches a bomb that smashes a taillight on Pujols' Rolls. As he leaves the cage, Hamilton saunters past Dipoto with a wide grin and says, "We're gonna have a lot of fun this year."





CITY OF DREAMS

TOP ROW
Hitting coach
Mark McGwire
CF Matt Kemp
LF Carl Crawford

SECOND ROW
P Hyun-Jin Ryu
P Chad Billingsley
SS Justin Sellers

THIRD ROW
1B Adrian Gonzalez
3B Juan Uribe
P Zack Greinke

FOURTH ROW
P Clayton Kershaw
SS Hanley Ramirez
P Josh Beckett

TOP ROW
P Ryan Madson
P Tommy Hanson
1B Albert Pujols

SECOND ROW
P Jered Weaver
CF Mike Trout
C John Hester

THIRD ROW
LF Josh Hamilton
P Jason Vargas
P C.J. Wilson

FOURTH ROW
LF Mark Trumbo
P Joe Blanton
P Barry Enright

We made the best Civic even better.

Introducing a funner, smarter, techier Honda Civic. Funner, with Pandora® compatibility.[1] Smarter, with a customizable multi-informational display and SMS texting functionality.[2] Techier, with standard features like *Bluetooth*,[®3] USB integration[4] and rearview camera. Basically, it's everything…er.

[1]Pandora, the Pandora logo, and the Pandora trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of Pandora Media, Inc. Used with permission. Compatible with select smartphones. See: www.pandora.com/everywhere/mobile. Not all devices compatible with USB connection. Your wireless carrier's rate plans apply. [2]Compatible with select phones with *Bluetooth*.® Your wireless carrier's rate plans apply. State or local laws may limit use of texting feature. Only use texting feature when conditions allow

you to do so safely. [3]The *Bluetooth*® word mark and logos are owned by the Bluetooth SIG, Inc., and any use of such marks by Honda Motor Co., Ltd., is under license. [4]The USB Audio Interface is used for direct connection to and control of some current digital audio players and other USB devices that contain MP3, WMA or AAC music files. Some USB devices with security software and digital rights-protected files may not work. Please see your Honda dealer for details. EX-L model shown. ©2013 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

MLB CONFIDENTIAL

It's true: Everyone in baseball thinks he can win the World Series. Our spring training Confidential team found that 97.2% of the 110 players surveyed honestly think they have the roster to hoist the Commissioner's Trophy. Of course, not everyone was adamant, like this pitcher from an unlikely winner: "If everything breaks right and other teams have injuries or play really bad, we absolutely have a shot." For the truth on all the hot topics in baseball, we promised anonymity. The intel is yours. BY MORTY AIN, PATRICK CAIN, LOUISE K. CORNETTA, DAN FRIEDELL AND STACEY PRESSMAN

WHICH PLAYER DO YOU THINK WILL BE A **BREAKOUT STAR** IN 2013?

Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo (12.1%) and Pirates outfielder Starling Marte (8.8%) got plenty of votes. But those who like Bruce Rondon (7.7%) come with the most interesting commentary. The Tigers' 22-year-old fireballing reliever has batters lined up who aren't interested in facing him. "Normally you don't want a rookie closer," says a veteran reliever. **"But Rondon is scary nasty.** He's as good as the legends about him throwing 104."

ANTHONY RIZZO

12%

WHICH TEAM IS THE **HOTTEST MESS** IN BASEBALL?

Players have serious opinions on this question. "It's not close: The Red Sox will be a disaster," says an NL pitcher. "And I bet the pressure builds as the team spirals too." Counters another pitcher: "New team, new owners, new league—the Astros are a complete mess." But those clubs trail one that cut about $160 million from its payroll. **"What the Marlins did is a disgrace,"** says a catcher. "I've talked to other players. That will be remembered by free agents for a long time."

MARLINS

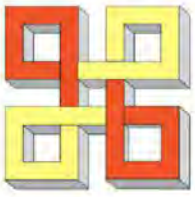
43%

DISMANTLED

ASTROS

38%

TRIPLE-A TEAM



RED SOX

10%

AGING

DO YOU KNOW OF ANY **GAY PLAYERS?**

The vast majority answered no (94.6%), with about an equal split then saying some version of "Nobody would care" or "It wouldn't bother me, but it would be a problem for other guys" when asked to elaborate. **Then there are the 5.4% who already know of a gay colleague.** "Yes, but that's as far as I want to go, even if this is anonymous," says one NL player.

YES

5%

WHO IS **THE LAST PLAYER** YOU'D EVER WANT TO ADD TO YOUR CLUBHOUSE?

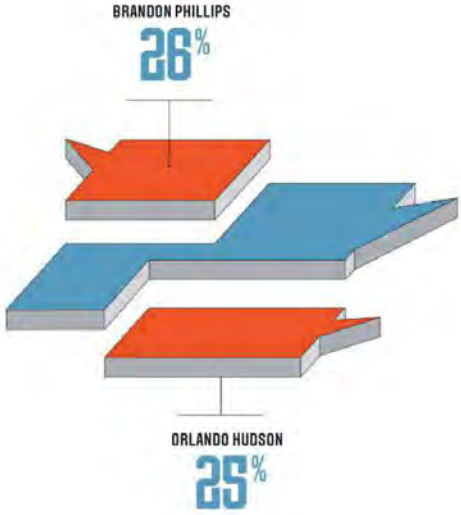
Says an NL pitcher: "I'll go with A-Rod, and I love saying it. **For the money he makes, he brings nothing but headaches.** I don't know who else could be in the conversation." After Alex Rodriguez (28.4%), another 14.9% tab Texas' A.J. Pierzynski (below left) and a surprising 10.8% select Brewers star Ryan Braun (center). "Nobody likes Braun," says an AL slugger. "He cheated, and the only reason he got off is that the old owner of the team is the commissioner."

WHO WILL WIN THE **WORLD SERIES?**

The top three favorites all come from the AL, with votes for the Blue Jays (18.4%), Angels (12.6%) and Tigers (10.7%) making it clear which league has the upper hand. **"I still can't believe the Angels didn't win the World Series last year,** and now they have Josh Hamilton," says one AL veteran. "But top to bottom, the Blue Jays are stacked and the more complete team."

WHO HAS **THE MOST CREATIVE INFIELD CHATTER** IN MLB?

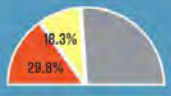
Players are loud and clear about the loudest yappers: Reds second baseman Brandon Phillips (25.8%) and free agent utility guy Orlando Hudson (24.7%). Most players laugh about the two infielders, saying that even though their mouths always run, nobody can quite follow what they say. "It's very close," says an NL outfielder. "I'll go with Phillips because he's so creative that **I don't even know what he's talking about.** With both guys, though, it's just a bunch of words."



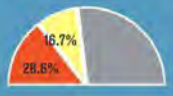
EXTRA BASES

WHICH PLAYER HAS THE WORST POTTY MOUTH IN BASEBALL?
1. GRANT BALFOUR
T2. A.J. PIERZYNSKI
T2. KEVIN YOUKILIS

WHICH NONPLAYOFF TEAM FROM 2012 WILL SURPRISE THE MOST IN 2013?
1. BLUE JAYS
2. ANGELS



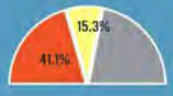
WHICH 2012 PLAYOFF TEAM IS MOST LIKELY TO NOT MAKE THE POSTSEASON IN 2013?
1. A'S
2. ORIOLES



IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PLAYERS ARE STILL TAKING PEDs?
AVERAGE ANSWER: 9.2%

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN DISHONEST WITH A TRAINER ABOUT A POTENTIAL CONCUSSION?
YES: 6.7%
NO: 93.3%

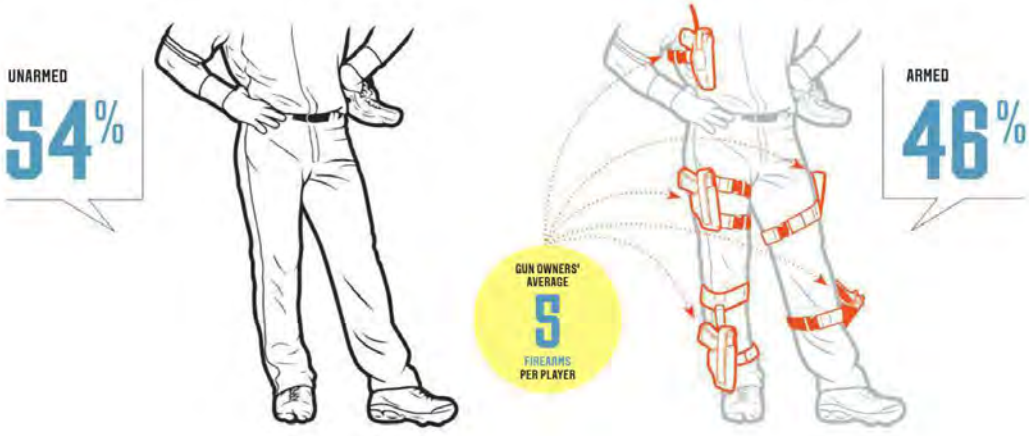
IF YOUR TEAM WAS OUT OF THE PLAYOFFS, WHICH TEAM WOULD YOU ROOT THE HARDEST AGAINST?
1. YANKEES
2. GIANTS



IF YOUR TEAM WAS OUT OF THE PLAYOFFS, WHICH TEAM WOULD YOU MOST ROOT FOR TO WIN THE WORLD SERIES?
1. TIGERS; 2. BRAVES

HOW MANY **GUNS** DO YOU OWN?

More than half of those surveyed say they don't own any guns. But the remaining 51 respondents have a total of 258 firearms among them (5.1 per gun-owning player), for an overall average of 2.4 per player. "Let me ask you something," says a potential Cy Young Award winner. "If you were rich and famous and your salary was in the newspaper every week, would you worry about your wife and kids? That's why I have guns."



Illustrations by TODD DETWILER

PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JIM PRISCHING/AP IMAGES; LEON HALIP/GETTY IMAGES; JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP IMAGES; PAUL BATTAGLIA/AP IMAGES; THIS PAGE: THINKSTOCK (3)

photographs by ANDREW KAUFMAN
ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN SPROULS; PHOTO REFERENCE: CAL SPORT MEDIA/AP IMAGES

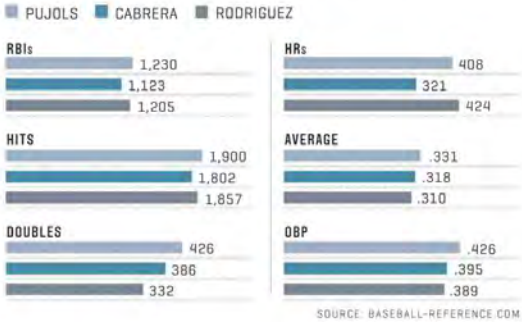
HANDLE WITH CARE

BY SAM ALIPOUR

FOR 10 YEARS, **MIGUEL CABRERA** HAS BEEN ONE OF BASEBALL'S MOST ENIGMATIC STARS. NOW, FINALLY, HE EXPLAINS WHY.

HEAVY HITTER

Miguel Cabrera's superstar production in the decade since his rookie season at age 20 puts his career in lockstep with those of the century's biggest hitters, Albert Pujols (21 as a rookie) and Alex Rodriguez (19). Shown are totals in their first 10 seasons with at least 300 plate appearances.



SOURCE: BASEBALL-REFERENCE.COM

UNPREDICTABILITY INDEX

Cabrera's production isn't just towering. It's now 28% less prone to ups and downs than average (index of 1, with 0 being perfectly consistent year to year and 2 being terribly inconsistent).

.72

Cabrera is known throughout the league for his jokes and nonstop trash-talk during games.

MIGUEL

Cabrera, the reigning American League MVP and baseball's first Triple Crown winner in 45 years, is mad at me.

He won't say as much. In fact, he'll deny it when I ask him, straight up, at lunch in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in February. "I'm not mad," the Tigers third baseman mutters through pursed lips even though everything about his demeanor—arms folded tightly over his stomach, eyes fixed on his crossed ankles, burly back slouched so low in his seat it'd take a bulldozer to pry him out—suggests otherwise.

Before I managed to completely alienate one of America's most accomplished sports stars, Cabrera had been open and animated in sharing his journey from the pebbled fields of Maracay, Venezuela, to his recent standout season. This from a man who, while absolutely fearless in the batter's box, is also fiercely protective of his privacy and rarely opens up to anyone outside of a small circle of family and friends. Cabrera entrusted me with his story in part because he'd come to know me and my own American tale. Like Cabrera's, my family migrated here from a faraway place, arriving in limbo—no longer a part of our old world, not quite at home in the new one. For a short while, I dwelled inside his bubble. Now I'm being shoved out by its keeper, who's either oddly paranoid or rightfully furious, depending on your opinion of my crime: asking him about his past issues with alcohol.

"Don't be mad, Miguel."

He doesn't respond. The interview is over. With 30 hours to go in my tour of Cabrera's world, my host will say nothing else to me aside from "hola" and "thank you." And in neither case will Cabrera look me in the eye.

TO STRANGERS, CABRERA IS A MAN OF FEW WORDS AND RARELY EVER WARMS UP.
"HE'S GUARDED."

JUSTIN VERLANDER

THE REAL CABRERA IS APPARENTLY A GOOFY GUY WITH A BIG HEART.
"HE'S A GREAT KID."

MANAGER JIM LEYLAND

ON A FROZEN January morning in Detroit, a bus full of Tigers sits outside the players' hotel. The team is heading out on its Winter Caravan, an annual meet-and-greet with fans at sites across the state. And we're all waiting on Cabrera.

He has earned the grace period, of course. The 29-year-old is coming off one of the greatest seasons in baseball's modern era, having led his Tigers to a runner-up finish in the World Series while also becoming the first player since Carl Yastrzemski in 1967 to top the league in home runs, RBIs and batting average. And that hallowed Triple Crown is just the latest addition to a dazzling collection of achievements—seven All-Star selections, two batting titles, two home run titles and a World Series win accrued over a 10-year career that has earned Cabrera every bit of his $152 million contract as well as the admiration of his peers, who in November voted him Player of the Year.

Now all eyes are on Cabrera, who arrives a few minutes late, dressed in a black hoodie and baggy jeans. A Tigers staffer facilitates a curbside introduction. "What's up, Miguel!" I yelp. "Hello," he replies. "Looks like I'll be bugging you for a while," I add. "Thank you," he says. That's it. Cabrera slaps five with his boys and claims the back row. I sit near the front.

I'd been warned that to strangers Cabrera is a man of few words. He loathes interviews and rarely ever warms up to outsiders. Still,

17

A RARE TRIFECTA

The number of times in major league history that a player has reached or exceeded all of Miguel Cabrera's 2012 Triple Crown numbers of 44 homers, 139 RBIs and a .330 batting average in a season (breakdown at right).

BABE RUTH	●●●●●●
LOU GEHRIG	●●●●
JIMMIE FOXX	●●●
HACK WILSON	●
JOE DiMAGGIO	●
MANNY RAMIREZ	●
TODD HELTON	●

Cabrera's reps felt that with all his success recently, the time was right for their client's first all-access profile. But first, they cautioned, I'd have to get him to like me. That's why I'm in Detroit—to be likable.

With Cabrera inaccessible, I cozy up to centerfielder Austin Jackson and ask him about his teammate's shyness. "It's funny to hear that he's shy," he says. "With us he's the opposite—each day he comes in with a smile and a great attitude." Justin Verlander agrees: "He's kind of guarded, but once you get to know him, he's a very jovial guy." Adds GM Dave Dombrowski, who's known Cabrera for 14 years: "We'd like to see him retire as a Tiger. He's a great player, but it's the way he handles himself, his smile, the way he is with the youngsters—he represents your organization in fine fashion."

The consensus is clear: Cabrera is a goofy guy who plays baseball with unbridled joy, puts only family before team, respects his teammates and adores children. But he hates the spotlight.

Unfortunately for him, that's exactly what the Winter Caravan is all about. Its second stop is the North American International Auto Show, where the General Motors display area is teeming with folks eager to ask the quiet Tiger questions. How does it feel to be MVP? "Awesome." They laugh. How was it moving to third base? Cabrera points to his now-wide orbs. "See my eyes?" They laugh some more.

Cabrera's shift to third last season to accommodate incoming first baseman Prince Fielder was a huge hit with the locals. A first baseman since 2008, Cabrera began training for his new job immediately upon Fielder's signing last January, staying late to take grounders during spring training. "That kind of sacrifice for the good of the team rubs people in a good way, especially in a blue-collar town like Detroit," says Andrew Travis, 27, a fan. Nobody appreciated it more than Fielder. "For a superstar to do what he did for me, they have to have confidence in their skills and be willing to work hard," Fielder says. "I'll forever be grateful for Miguel's sacrifice."

This is why the Tigers adore Cabrera. "It starts with the fact that he's a great kid," manager Jim Leyland explains, "but don't kid yourself—these guys are smart enough to know they're playing with one of the greatest players of all time. That's part of the equation."

Still, few of Cabrera's teammates truly know him. Even with Verlander, his teammate of five years, Cabrera can be prone to awkwardness. Traveling in a chauffeured SUV at one point during the Caravan, I watched the two men sit in stone-cold silence for nearly 10 minutes, the slugger twiddling on his phone. Finally Verlander lobbed an ice-breaker: "Whatchya watching?" No response. Another excruciating minute later, Miggy mercifully offered the pitcher his phone.

MIDNIGHT MOON

Any more authentic and it would be illegal. Midnight Moon follows Junior Johnson's legendary moonshine recipe, is handmade in small batches, distilled from corn and authentically infused with real fruit.

JuniorsMidnightMoon.com

RHINOCO

NUTRIFORCE SPORTS

POWERED BY FUSE SCIENCE

RHINOCO

At RhinoCo Fitness, we provide the best nutritional and recovery options. NutriForce Sport is "made for the fittest athletes in the world," and is the most complete supplement line ever created. Fuse science is changing the game with their energy and electrolyte and recovery technology. Check out nutriforce.com and fusescience.com, and be on your way to becoming a better athlete.

For the full circle of wellness visit **rhinocofitness.com**

PLAYTEX

For men and women, before and after sex, Fresh + Sexy™ wipes are the perfect way to clean where it counts so you're ready for whatever comes next...

freshandsexy.com

On the screen was an image of Cabrera's baby son, a tiny bat in his hands. Verlander laughed heartily. "That's awesome," he said.

Back at the auto show, the rest of the team scatters to gawk at the latest rides. But Miggy couldn't look more bored. "Not a car guy?" I ask him. "Naw," Cabrera replies. I concur: "Waste of f—ing money." He nods. "You curse so much," he says. Damn, strike one.

Cabrera eventually sees something he likes, a Jeep Wrangler Sand Trooper. My high school ride was a '92 Wrangler, I tell him, "the girls f—ing loved it." Whoops, strike two. I'm toast.

But wait—Cabrera's smiling. Then he floats a question out of nowhere: "You do archery?"

IT'S A WARM winter day in Fort Lauderdale, two weeks after the Detroit trip, and Cabrera is staring down a synthetic deer at Bass Pro Shops. He lifts his compound bow and lets the carbon-fiber arrow fly.

THWAP.

It hits the deer's "kill zone." If it were real, it'd be dead. "*Mejor*," Cabrera says. He's happy.

The itinerary for our two days together is vague but includes a lunchtime interview, dinner with the Cabrera family and archery, Cabrera's latest hobby. He used to play golf. He didn't enjoy golf because he is a terrible golfer. Miggy is a great archer. Miggy loves archery.

As Dombrowski put it, "Miguel doesn't like to be embarrassed." The GM was citing the extra work Cabrera put in at third base, but he could've been talking about any of Cabrera's pursuits. "When I do something," Cabrera says, "I don't want to be second best. That's the right way." And that way leads to a lot of overtime. While it is true that Cabrera is blessed with physical gifts—a hawk's vision, a bear's legs, a pianist's hands, the torso of a lumberjack—he is a worker and, says Dombrowski, "an encyclopedia of pitchers." Cabrera studies their hitting charts, intensely observes their pitches from the dugout and, legend has it, remembers every pitch by every starting pitcher he's ever faced. But there's a limit: He doesn't like game tape. It leads to overthinking, and he thinks too much as it is. "My wife says I don't listen when she talks," he'll explain, "but when people talk, I'm in my own world. I think, always thinking."

Cabrera doesn't overthink his archery. He picked up the sport last year, because hunting is a pastime of his kin, and kept at it because he found it relaxing. In November he spent the tense hours prior to the MVP announcement at this range with his agent of more than six years, Diego Bentz, who is with us this day to serve as communication facilitator and protector. But things are going well. I'd even surprised Cabrera earlier with my choppy but excellently pronounced Spanish. ("*Mi español es basura.*") He seemed confused, so I explained: I acquired English as a child, and when you're fluent in multiple languages early enough, you can nail pronunciation in any tongue. He nodded knowingly.

After several rounds, Cabrera extends his weapon to me. Then he hides beside a bench in the back. "He gonna kill us," he warns.

And he may be right. I lift the heavy bow and let loose on a wolf.

THUD.

"Where did it go?" a clerk shouts. I have no clue where it went. Nobody does. "They can't find your arrow!" Cabrera howls. It'll be several minutes before the range's four-man crew locates the thing, high up the back wall. "Get the ladder!" This is embarrassing. "Good job," Cabrera says, once he stops cackling.

LIKE THE ARCHERY range, Islamorada Fish Company is a comfortable spot for Cabrera. The staff knows to give him a corner table where nobody can bother him. The plan, hatched with Cabrera's reps, is to play the interview by ear: If he isn't feeling it, hit pause, take a short off-the-record break. But Cabrera is feeling our first topic.

"*Love* movies," he says. "It starts when I met my girlfriend in Venezuela." That girl, now wife Rosangel, was 13 at the time. The teenagers spent most dates at the theater, and six years after they met, Cabrera, by that point a Marlin, returned to Venezuela to claim the only woman he'd ever loved. "Because we were so young," Cabrera says, "her family doesn't like it. But we said, 'This is what we want.'" Miguel and Rosangel wed in a church, "and when we return to U.S.," he continues, "we go to any movie. And we buy some movies." Translation of "some": 1,000 DVDs. Cabrera loves comedies. Rosangel prefers scary movies. "I get bad dreams," he says. "Like, *Se7en*—o'my god, that's scary."

The Cabreras have three children: Christopher, 1; Isabella, 2; and Rosangel, 7, whom everyone calls Brisel. "When Brisel was born, I was 22." He laughs. "I was excited to play with her." If there is one thing that Cabrera does

FROM LEFT: JIM MONE/AP IMAGES; JOHN MUNSON/THE STAR-LEDGER/USA TODAY SPORTS

With teammate Prince Fielder (far left), daughter Isabella (center), 2, and agent Diego Bentz, Cabrera is all smiles. It's strangers who scare him.

better than baseball, it's playtime. That includes years of goofy "conditioning drills" with Dombrowki's now-13-year-old boy, Landon, "paper baseball" with his baby cousins and, in South Florida, basketball with the neighborhood kids. But one playpen stands above the rest. "In Venezuela we always talk about Disney World," he says. "Now I go every chance—a dream come true." Cabrera can't count the number of times he's been to the park, but his teammates say it's a lot, and sometimes he drags them with him. He buys his own Mickey T-shirts and waits in line with everyone else. "At Disney you can do anything," he says, still in awe. "So much fun."

The Tigers were right; Cabrera is a big kid. And kids like to hang with their own. "They're happy," he says. "They make you happy." And perhaps most important to Cabrera, their motives are easily understood. "They always speak the truth," he says. "Adults, no. When you grow up, people don't speak the truth. You can see, when you trust people, you help them." Then, he continues, "they do something bad." Cabrera isn't agitated when he says this and, in the moment, seems to be speaking to a litany of betrayals, the kind that come when you're young, famous and wary. Trust is a topic Cabrera returns to often. Trust, he will insist, is why his inner circle is limited to long-timers from Maracay. And trust, or rather the lack thereof, is why when Cabrera swings his last bat for money, he will move back there.

Jose Miguel Cabrera was raised in a small home with one bathroom, a kitchen and two rooms in a community of five homes where extended family lived. Cabrera bunked with his younger sister, Ruth, but preferred to spend most of his time with a rowdy brood of friends who threw punches on the diamond and called Cabrera *cabeza tren* (train head) for his large noggin. Cabrera disliked the handle but knew "if

OAKLEY

Oakley Cipher™ 2 is the lightest performance golf shoe in the world at just 9.2 ounces. A technical innovation leader constructed with a one piece waterproof synthetic skin upper, Coreflex technology and a user adaptable NanoSpike™ traction system.

Oakley.com/golf

GNC
MEGA MEN®
SPORT VITAPAK®

A four-supplement pack designed specifically for active men. Contains our scientifically formulated Mega Men® Sport Multivitamin with 1,600 IU of vitamin D-3 and an energy enhancer to boost metabolism and burn calories. Also included is an L-Arginine and L-Citrulline combination to provide support for nitric oxide production and L-glutamine to support recovery.

gnclivewell.com/vitapak

Oscar Mayer

CARVING BOARD

With OSCAR MAYER CARVING BOARD Pulled Pork, the tailgate is never far away. It's slow-smoked and deliciously seasoned for that big BBQ taste. It's game time food. It's OSCAR MAYER.

oscarmayer.com

Cabrera loves doing whatever he does well: hitting, hitting for power and now his new hobby, archery.

you get mad, they call you that every day. Can't show it."

Young Cabrera learned to keep his thoughts bottled up, and the older one isn't much different. His parents, he says, are divorced. His father, Miguel, ran an auto shop. His mom, Gregoria, was a longtime veteran of the national softball team but left her son's training to his uncle, David Torres, a former minor league baseball player. Cabrera was 15 when he tried out for Louie Eljaua, then a Marlins scout. Impressed by the boy's sure fielding, cannon arm and spring-loaded bat, Eljaua called scouting director Al Avila, who traveled to Venezuela to watch Cabrera play before phoning his boss. "This kid's a special talent," Avila told then-Marlins GM Dave Dombrowski.

At 16 Cabrera signed with the Marlins for $1.8 million. At 20 he smacked a walk-off homer in his big league debut. Four months after that, he was in his first World Series, squaring off against Roger Clemens. True to form, the Rocket began by firing a fastball past Cabrera's chin. The kid stared at the legend and then got to work, with two swinging strikes, another ball and two foul-offs before eventually driving the seventh pitch over the rightfield wall. "It still makes me smile," recalls Mike Redmond, his former teammate and the current Marlins manager. "I looked at Jeff Conine and said, 'This kid isn't afraid of anything.'"

When I ask Cabrera whether he was afraid facing Clemens, he shrugs and says, "Naw." Okay then, I counter, "What's your biggest fear on earth?"

"People. You can't trust people."

I ask Cabrera whether he'd been wronged by anyone in particular. Bentz lends a hand: "When Miguel gets on the plane for America, he's a kid dealing with a new language, culture, pressure. Then he wins the World Series. Now everybody wants something, here and in Venezuela. Miguel is loyal. He expects the same." Cabrera won't elaborate except to say that, for him, "baseball was easy. Outside is the hard part."

When Cabrera arrived in the States, he shared an apartment in Florida with five Latin American A-ball players. Back then, "I speak no English—zero. You can't do anything because you don't go places where you have to speak. You go to eat, you eat same thing: Burger King, No. 3. They ask, 'French fries?' You say yes. They ask for size, you say yes. They ask, 'Medium or large?' You say yes." First he signed up for English classes. Later he devoured newspapers at the advice of Adrian Gonzalez, his Rookie-ball roommate. "People make fun of me because they say I see only the pictures," he says, "but I learn to see the words they say."

But just as Cabrera was growing more comfortable with the language, as well as the forgiving ears of his teammates, he was rejected by the Marlins. In December of 2007, after his fifth season with the ballclub, he recalls in a hushed tone, "I was driving and the GM and manager call me, tell me I was traded to Tigers. I ask, 'Why? I don't want to leave. I want to stay. I feel comfortable.' They say that's the way it is." Cabrera would come to love Detroit—not the cold, but the "humble values" of the organization and the locals. But his discomfort with the reactions to his struggles with the English language still makes him nervous. Which is why, even though his English is just fine, distrust keeps him quiet. "If I say something wrong, it's a big thing on Twitter."

Bentz chimes in again. "This offseason is different," he says. "A lot of people are around him. You have to be careful."

I REPEATEDLY OFFER Cabrera a courtesy timeout. With each, he counters with, "I'm good." It'll be an hour before we order lunch, and when his meal arrives—grouper with a baked potato—he ignores it, and not because of his weight. Cabrera laughs at our obsession with his scale readings. "When they call me fat I only 255, and I weighed more [than that] when people say I'd lost 25 pounds!" (Little Gordito, as Leyland calls him, is at 268 now, and the skipper is fine with that.)

At various times, Cabrera and I bond over the similarities in our stories. When the Alipours left Iran for America, we sprinted to Disneyland every chance we got, and in those early years we dined at only one place—Burger King. My empathy seems to comfort him, but he really doesn't need much prodding. "I trying to let people know me better," he says. In fact, he's gaining a reputation around the league for being an in-game chatterbox. Says one starting pitcher: "From the first pitch, he's talking: 'What's up, you want a base hit here?'" Adds a reliever: "He has the best personality in the game." And Cabrera puts it to good use in regular meetings with the Tigers' Latino prospects. "I talk about their girlfriend back home," he explains. "I say, 'Be a f—ing man! If you no work hard, no get money, your girlfriend get happy with another man over there!'"

"After that meeting," he adds, "half the guys call their girlfriends and say, 'Tell me the truth, what are you doing!'"

Cabrera is on fire now, and we're laughing as much as speaking. But we've been speaking for two hours, and I have one last topic to discuss. I inform him of the coming questions in the same way I'd alerted his reps: Asking about a subject's warts is standard operating procedure for a profile, and I'd like to discuss his highly publicized wart, alcohol use. More than standard operating procedure, however, fans know very little about Cabrera outside of two high-profile alcohol-related legal scrapes.

In 2009, in the midst of a playoff race, he was detained after an altercation with Rosangel, and when tested by police, his blood alcohol

Unilever
AXE
APOLLO
LEAVE A MAN. COME BACK A HERO
NEW AXE APOLLO
JOIN NOW AT AXEAPOLLO.COM

Like it or not, Cabrera's stats guarantee that the media will not stop trying to figure him out.

level was 0.26, more than three times the legal limit. (Police could not identify an aggressor, and no charges were filed.) The morning he was released, Cabrera found Dombrowski waiting for him. "He continually expressed how sorry he was," the GM recalls. "At that point, it's tough love. You know he has a problem. You help him. But it starts with the player being willing to tackle whatever problem he has. He was at the front and center of that."

Cabrera entered counseling but relapsed in February 2011. According to a report released by the Florida state attorney's office, the trouble started at a restaurant in Fort Pierce, Fla., where Cabrera threatened staff. ("I will kill all of you and blow this place up!") Later a deputy came upon Cabrera's disabled vehicle on the side of the road. In front of officers, Cabrera defiantly swigged from a bottle of scotch, boasted, "F— you! Do you know who I am?" and goaded, "Shoot me. Kill me." It took "three to four knee spikes" to get him into the car. Police charged Cabrera, who declined an alcohol test, with suspicion of DUI and resisting officers without violence. He pleaded no contest to the DUI, and the resisting charge was dropped. He was sentenced to probation and ordered to pay $1,436.23.

The guy I'd spent the day with was not the one in that police report. But those incidents, and how they re-emerge, help fuel his distrust of the world. Outside of hitting baseballs, these moments are the prism through which many people view him. Even last fall, during the Tigers' playoff run, much was made of Cabrera's wariness about attending Detroit's division title party even though nonalcoholic champagne was on the menu. And this spring, the Tigers brass has hailed Cabrera for dealing with the issue.

He looks surprised that I want to bring up the topic. I'm surprised he's surprised. I plow ahead anyway and ask him about the division title celebration: "My team want me in there. I tell them, 'Don't worry.' You don't want to give them reason to write something in papers."

Next I ask Cabrera whether he can handle being around alcohol. "I be around it," he says. "Let me tell you this: When you back home in Venezuela, everybody drinking." Venezuelans like to barbecue too. Cabrera regularly hosts Florida grill sessions for his Venezuelan friends. What about the alcohol? "I'm able to be strong and say no," he says. "It's not any problem with me."

"What led to that 2009 incident?" I ask. The question agitates Cabrera. He and Bentz converse in Spanish. "Go out and party, and I had a bad day in my house," Cabrera says finally. "You never get drunk?"

"All the time," I offer. Cabrera doesn't laugh. "What led to the 2011 incident? Another bad day?" After a second huddle with his agent, Cabrera says, "It was a wake-up call."

Bentz has heard enough: "What are you trying to tie in there?"

"I'm trying to understand what led to the incident."

"The engine blew up," Bentz says. "He was driving, and the car broke down."

"I'm talking about the DUI incident—"

"That's the incident," Bentz interjects.

Looking back at Cabrera, I say, "Is this a problem you've solved?"

Bentz tells me to shut my recorder for an off-the-record chat. When I flick it back on, Cabrera says simply, "I don't drink." The interview is over, a waiter is summoned. I read the cues and thank Cabrera for his time. "Thank you," he mutters.

IT'S 7 A.M. THE next morning and I'm standing outside the weight room at Michael-Ann Russell Jewish Community Center before Cabrera, Bentz and a third gentleman, the agent's associate. Late last night, word trickled down: My visit to Cabrera's home is off, there will be no dinner with his family, and even Cabrera himself is off-limits outside of two observation-only appointments, beginning with this morning's workout.

"Hola, Miguel," I say. Cabrera extends a hello back but won't make eye contact.

Maybe I pushed too hard, too soon. Maybe Cabrera is just a big kid who takes his ball and goes home when a visitor doesn't play by his rules. Or maybe that's not it at all. I challenged a man who hates to be embarrassed and possesses a pathological distrust of strangers. Cabrera allowed me inside his bubble, and now he fears I'll twist his words, very few of which were about his past drinking, into a story about his drinking. "This is why I don't do interviews," he'd said during our conversation at lunch. "Everybody asks this forever. All you want to know." And maybe he's right to wonder what the value is in letting us in. Maybe he's better off being a guy who knocks the hell out of a baseball and hopes that if he says very little, then one day his gifts on the field will push what has happened off it down the list of Internet search results.

The final appointment on our itinerary is an ESPN commercial shoot at the new Marlins Park to promote the network's MLB coverage. When Cabrera isn't being directed on the darkened field, which is swamped with sound engineers and lighting crew, he keeps to himself—pantomiming his pull-up jumper or whispering to Bentz. Then, midway through the shoot, he receives a surprise visit from his old teammate, Redmond. After their chat, the Marlins skipper is still smiling. "Miggy's just always in a good mood," Redmond says.

After one last shot in the clubhouse an hour later, it's a wrap. "Thank you, Miguel Cabrera!" the director bellows. "Thank you mucho, everybody," Cabrera says as he bolts for the clubhouse door, leaving even Bentz and Bentz's guy behind. I give chase, hoping to have a word with Cabrera, or even a goodbye, but by the time I exit the packed clubhouse, my subject is 30 yards away and briskly moving down the empty tunnel. As he nears the exit, he turns and locks eyes with me. He holds the gaze for several seconds but says nothing. His face portrays no emotion. And then Miguel is gone. ■

ESPN (ISSN # 1097-1998) (USPS # 016-356), Volume 16, No. 6 April 1, 2013. ESPN is published biweekly, except monthly in January and July, by ESPN, 77 West 66th St., New York, NY. 10023-6201. The subscription price is $26 for one year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ESPN, P.O. Box 37325, Boone, IA 50037-0325. For subscription queries, call customer service at 1-888-267-3684. To change your address, log on to www.accountinfo.espnmag.com.

DID YOU KNOW?

If you subscribe to this

☑ *ESPN The Magazine*

you also get this

+

☑ **ESPN Insider Online Access**

☑ ***ESPN The Magazine* App for iPad™**

and it's

FREE!

ESPN Insider & *The Magazine* App are FREE to *Magazine* subscribers.

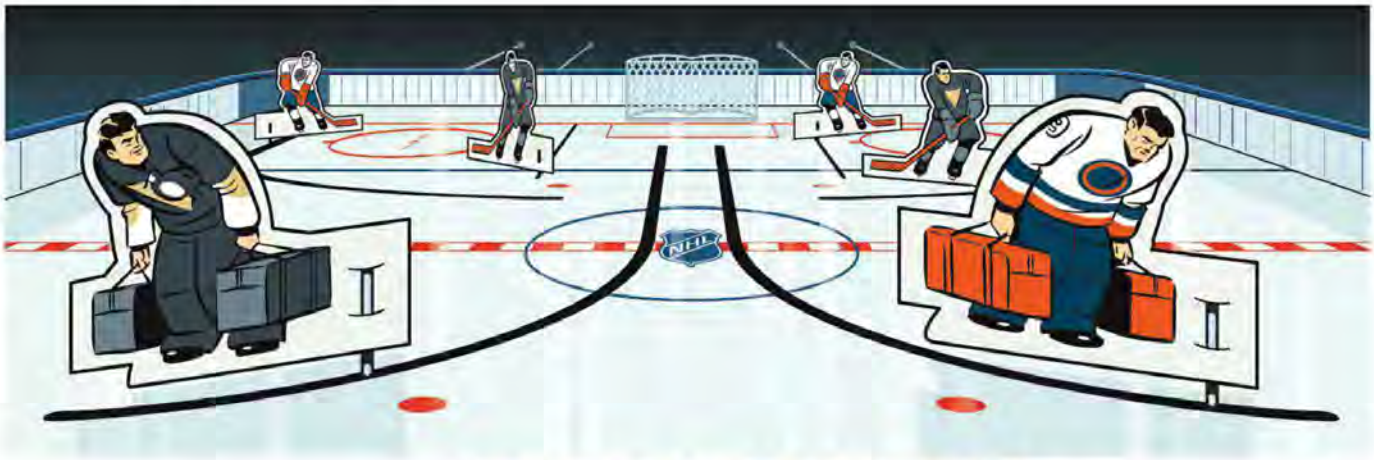
To activate, simply go to: www.espn.com/activate

ESPN THE MAGAZINE

Available on the App Store

Apple and the Apple logo are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. iPad is a trademark of Apple Inc. Offer requires credit card for activation.

by CHRIS JONES



[REVERSAL OF FORTUNE] *When journeyman Brent Johnson dropped golden boy Rick DiPietro in a famous 2011 goalie scrap, both of their lives changed course.*

In the seconds before goalies Rick DiPietro and Brent Johnson fought on that fateful February night two years ago, in the instant before they grabbed each other's jerseys and cocked their fists, DiPietro was, by most measures, the more fortunate of the two. He was the first-round draft pick, the future of the Islanders, the owner of an impossibly secure 15-year, $67.5 million contract. Johnson was the aging backup for the Penguins, his sixth organization, earning $600,000 season by tenuous season. Only Johnson had spent sleepless nights wondering whether he'd played his last NHL game; only he knew how it felt to be sent down. But then Johnson threw a single punch, a leveler. And everything that was true before that fight would not be true after.

This morning Johnson is eating strawberry crepes at a bakery outside Pittsburgh. He'd arrived in a spotless black Jaguar. Although he is not playing hockey at the moment—he struggled last season and couldn't find a postlockout contract—he still looks like a hockey player, lean and put together. At 36 he looks like the end game of best-laid plans.

Last night, a world and 471 miles away in Hartford, Conn., DiPietro, 31, returned to the Bridgeport Sound Tigers, having been demoted to the AHL, a move that was somehow both shocking and inevitable at the same time. In his past five injury-filled seasons, he'd won just 14 games. Slump-shouldered and drawn, he'd told a reporter that he felt as though the Islanders had ripped out his heart; he went on to allow five goals on 12 shots and was pulled after the first period. "The Fight" might remain his most public humiliation, more than a million views on YouTube and counting, but now it had some competition.

Johnson remembers that night in 2011 with adrenaline's clarity. From the other end of the rink, he thought he saw DiPietro clothesline Pittsburgh winger Matt Cooke. The play was whistled. Johnson looked up at the scoreboard. The Penguins were winning 3-0; there were just 16.5 seconds left on the clock. For a guy looking to hold on, maybe a scrap wouldn't hurt his locker room reputation. "A perfect storm," Johnson calls it. He hollered at DiPietro, and DiPietro nodded.

In his long rush up the ice, Johnson flashed back to his first (and, until then, only) professional hockey fight. It was 11 years earlier, when he played for the Worcester IceCats, and he'd fought a big Canadian goalie named Patrick DesRochers of the Springfield Falcons. "It felt like his fist filled my whole face," Johnson says. DesRochers cut him with a wild left, and the scar over his eye remains a permanent reminder of lessons learned. When Johnson closed in on the lefthanded DiPietro, he was ready. In fact, he made up his mind to open with a surprise left of his own.

An incredulous DiPietro was still flat on his back when he pointed up at Johnson: "Are you a lefty?" Both men knew that damage had been done, each having experienced polar vantages of a face giving way. Johnson shook his head and patted DiPietro twice on the stomach. "F—," DiPietro said then, before he missed six weeks of hockey waiting for his fractures to heal. "Just one of those things," Johnson says today. It was just one punch out of the thousands thrown that season, in 645 NHL fights. It was just one more collision in a sport and a universe that sees millions of them.

By then Johnson had already mastered the hard art of acceptance. He had to. Backup goalies aren't masters of their own destinies. He doesn't especially want to be remembered best for a fight—"I'd rather be remembered as a good goalie, as a good guy"—but he knows that like so much of an athlete's life, how it ends was never really up to him.

We can't know how DiPietro's own career and life might have played out differently had it never included Johnson or his accumulation of what-ifs—if those 16.5 seconds had just ticked away, if Patrick DesRochers hadn't thrown that scarring left, if Johnson had gone with his right. Maybe those six lost weeks would have changed everything. Maybe they would have changed nothing. These are this winter's only certainties: Brent Johnson is going to escape with his wife and young daughter to Disney World; Rick DiPietro will earn millions to play hockey in Bridgeport. And it will be harder to tell than ever before: Who is the lucky one? ■

Illustration by MARK MATCHO

#KAOM
DIPPING SAUCE
KRAFT
NEW!
Miracle Whip
SMOKIN' BACON
NATURALLY FLAVORED
RANCH
miraclewhip
©2013 Kraft Foods Group, Inc.

ESPN Sports Heaven Collection

Ragtag, Irreverent, & Revolutionary

Celebrate where it all began.

Available online at ESPN SHOP

© 2012 ESPN, Inc.